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[THERE WAS A STRANGE DEEP TENDERNESS IN IVA'S EYES AS GERDA CRIED, "YOU HAVE COME BACK?"]

## IVA'S QUEST.

### CHAPTER VII.

BERTRAM LORD DUCIE had known many a moment of bitter sorrow.

For years he had carried within his breast the burden of an awful secret; but never, since the moment when Gerda's mother left him, had he known such fell despair as seized on him at his wife's words.

"In the eyes of the law Gerda is a nameless outcast, since, though you went through the ceremony of a sham marriage with her mother, she was never your wife."

It was all true—that was the cruel part of it! Bertram's secret was a sad one, and no woman with a spark of pity or compassion could have taunted him with the slur on his child's birth.

In the heyday of youth he had married a wife years his senior—a woman of low, degraded tastes and vicious habits, to which her great beauty had blinded him.

Within a month of their wedding he knew

her for what she was, and had left her for ever.

Then began a life of endless anxiety. More than half his liberal allowance went to purchase her silence.

At length came the welcome news she was dead. Within a year he had married his life's love—a gentle, tender creature, who fairly worshipped him.

Alas! the fury who had wrecked his happiness was only biding her time! She appeared suddenly at the little French village where Mr. and Mrs. Ducie were staying.

The fair young mother learned that she was no wife, and that her child was nameless. The blow killed her.

Bertram paid his tyrant liberally to keep silence, but money only sank her deeper in dissipation. In the end her husband placed her under the care of Peter Barton in her maiden name of Winter.

The moment Julia discovered the poor wreck of humanity had a right to be called Lady Ducie she determined to become her successor. She thought the secret she was married to keep was that Gerda had owned

such a mother. We know now how she discovered the truth.

Julia was a woman who hated all rivals—who could not forgive any one for being younger, prettier, or better than herself; besides, she hoped in due time to give her husband a child.

She was desperate to think that if it were not a son Gerda would remain her father's heiress.

From the moment the hope of being a mother came to her she hated her step-daughter as she had never done before. At all risks—at any sacrifice—Gerda must be disposed of—matrimonially or otherwise.

Strong as she was in will and obstinacy, she trembled just a little as she watched her husband's face. She would rather he had burst out into passionate reproaches than that cold, blank silence.

"It is true," she said at last, in an aggrieved tone. "You know you cannot deny it."

Still no answer.

"What are you looking at?" for Lord Ducie's eyes were fixed upon the fire as in-

tently as if he could read some history written in the flames.

"I was wondering whether you were fiend or woman!" he answered, desperately. "You compelled me to marry you, knowing I had neither love, honour, or esteem to offer you. You have oppressed and slighted my child ever since you crossed this threshold."

"I have not."

"I say you have! In common gratitude you should have been kind to Gerda."

"Gratitude! To whom?"

"To her. But for her sake I should never have married you. You owe title, home, and wealth solely to my anxiety for my child's peace."

"You are polite!"

"I am true. I married you because it was the price of your silence. I have studied your wishes, consulted your pleasure, and done my best to make you happy at Nether-ton, as you must confess."

"I should have been happy—very happy—but for her."

"Gerda?"

"Yes."

"What have you to grudge her?" asked the peer, reproachfully. "You are young, handsome, and admired; you have an easy home, an assured position, and many friends. No one in all the world can equal your name with cruel slanders; you are a peeress of England; and if I have been unable to give you love, at least I have showered on you all else I possessed to offer, while that poor child—"

"Has the one thing I covet—your heart!"

"Julia!"

The beautiful, stately woman was kneeling at his feet, her lovely hair had come unbound, and fell over her shoulders like a dusky veil.

"I love you!" she cried, wildly. "Is it a shame to say so when you are my wedded husband?—when I ought to be first with you in all the world? I know I married you from ambition—you may taunt me with it if you like—but ambition soon gave way to a stronger feeling, and I tell you that with every fibre of my nature I love you!"

Lord Ducie was touched, spite of himself, at her wild appeal, and yet more by the tears which flowed down her cheeks.

"Get up, Julia," he said, kindly. "Do not kneel to me. Heaven knows I never meant to judge you harshly, or to make you unhappy."

He had given her an advantage she was not slow to grasp.

"You wronged me cruelly!" she sobbed; "you let me think only the memory of that poor creature at Hornsea stood between us and your child. Do you think I would ever have stooped to marry you—aye, stooped, Lord Bertram!—if I had known your heart was filled with a dead love?—if I had guessed no tenderness of mine, no loving, dutiful, wifely affection could ever win from you a return?"

"Julia!"

"You deceived me from first to last; you brought me here for your daughter's benefit; you thought it advantageous to her to associate with a lady. As to me, my hopes, my happiness, what have you cared for either? Nothing—aye, less than nothing!"

"Julia listen to me."

"I will not listen until I have told you all that is in my mind. I will not continue my present life, subject to all your daughter's whims, second to her in every one's thoughts. I am your wife. I claim the first share of your thoughts, your time, and your companionship. I will no longer be thrust aside for Gerda, or else—"

Her dark eyes glittered with a feverish brilliancy.

"Beware! If you drive me to desperation by your worship of your idol I may be tempted to raise the veil you have flung over Gerda's history, and to tell the world her story and her mother's!"

A deep silence. Lord Ducie looked at his wife, and felt she meant just what she said. He knew she was quite capable of fulfilling her threat.

What she had told him of her own heart supplied another motive for her detesting her stepchild.

It came home to him slowly that Gerda's whole future was in Julia's hands; he himself was powerless to cope with his wife; he must give in to her in every way to purchase her silence.

An anxious fear smote him that ere long he might have to cast his child forth from his home. If Julia required the sacrifice he dared not refuse.

He could not explain to his darling his motives; she would think him cruel and forgetful of her happiness, and he would be unable to defend himself.

Lady Ducie saw her advantage.

"Why should we quarrel, Bertram?" she asked, softly. "Have I asked anything unreasonable? I only beg a share of your affection; I only want to be treated with the consideration that is your wife's due."

"And Gerda?"

"Gerda must stay here for the present—I never dreamed of anything else—only she must try and tolerate me; and if any sister came to ask her hand I think what we both know of her history should influence your answer. You cannot deny in your heart, Bertram, that I was right in saying Laurence Ward would be a first-rate match for her?"

Lord Ducie groaned.

"She shall never marry against her own inclination, come what may!"

"Well, Mr. Ward is not the only young man in the world. Let us cultivate a few others. I own I should like to see Gerda safely married."

"And it is my heart's desire!"

"Then, since we both wish the same thing, why should we quarrel about it?"

Lord Ducie smiled. Julia knew how to be fascinating. All the anger and scorn had died out of her face now, and she looked just a captivating woman, and nothing else.

Bertram Ducie went to bed thinking he had been a little hard on her, and that, faultless as was his Gerda, she seemed a little unjust to her stepmother.

And Gerda—she nibbled out her troubles to Nurse Brown in bitter anguish, her one plan being to secure her father alone for a brief half-hour, and tell him plainly she must leave the Chase; that the house that sheltered Lady Ducie could never more be home to her.

"She'll get her deserts," said the old nurse, fondly. "Dear me, Miss Gerda, there's always a judgment in store for them that oppress the orphan!"

"I never thought I could hate anyone," sobbed Gerda; "but, nurse, sometimes when she speaks in those cold, hard tones, and her eyes glitter just like a beautiful scorpion's, I feel as if I detested her."

"Your papa must have been blind to marry her, Miss Gerda, and I should like to tell him so. Perhaps, though, poor fellow, he couldn't help it!"

She was nearer far to the truth than she supposed.

"Not help it!" cried Gerda, indignantly. "Of course he could help it. No one could have made him propose to her."

"I don't know," said Nurse, thoughtfully. "When a clever woman makes up her mind to be married a man hasn't got much chance against her. I should say, Miss Gerda, that Lady Ducie married the master, not he her."

"But what can I do, nurse? I can't live here, and bear her unkindness. It would kill me!"

"Just bide your time, missie, and speak to your papa. My lord's a just man, and he won't see his own flesh and blood driven to despair if he can help it."

But Gerda chose her time wrongly. My lady was amiability itself the next morning.

She looked all smiles and urbanity when she took her place at the breakfast-table in her tasteful ruby cashmere. She talked lightly to her husband on the topics of the day. Lord Ducie loved to be amused, and his wife gave him the cream of the newspapers without his exerting himself to read them. He was in high good temper, and when Lady Ducie said she meant to drive over to lunch at Pierpoint Hall, and hoped Gerda would accompany her, he answered at once for his daughter that she would like the plan amazingly.

At that moment Gerda entered—breakfast was almost over—pale, heavy-eyed, her dress a loose morning wrapper. She looked a sorry contrast to the graceful Lady Ducie in her faultless winter costume.

Lord Ducie loved her dearly, but he was a man, and he could not make allowances for her depression. He put down her late appearance to sickness, her careless toilet to intentional disrespect. Here was Julia, all smiles and good humour, ready to propitiate. What could have made Gerda so disdainful and unforgiving? Lady Ducie never affected to notice anything amiss; her life was affability.

"Good morning!" she said, kindly. "I have a delightful plan, Gerda; I am going to drive you over to the Hall to lunch. A note from Lady Pierpoint came this morning."

"Thank you," returned Gerda, "I would prefer to stay at home."

"You had better come," persisted her stepmother; "it is such a lovely morning a drive will do you good."

"I wish I could go," said Lord Ducie, glancing at the October sunshine. "There is nothing I should like better, but my agent is coming at twelve, and I must be in to see him. I suppose you will start at eleven, Julia?"

"Yes. You had better be persuaded, Gerda. The Pierpoints will be so disappointed."

But Gerda's mind was made up—the hour between Lady Ducie's departure and the agent's visit she would claim her father's attention. In fancy she saw him her own again, and heavy retribution awaiting the wife who had temporarily estranged him from her.

"I prefer to remain at home."

"I must say you are ungracious," said Lord Ducie, a little crossly. "Generally you are wild to go over to the Pierpoints. What makes you refuse to-day?"

"I don't suppose they want me."

Lady Ducie handed her the note of invitation.

"I can go some other day," persisted Gerda.

"Lady Pierpoint will have you."

Lady Ducie put away the note.

"You are quite sure?"

"Perfectly."

"Then I must go alone, Bertram," to her husband. "We shall have time to go through the grounds, and choose out the spot for the new flower-beds."

Lady Ducie was a person of many gifts; she was a born gardener and botanist. Already her taste had worked changes in the grounds, which even Gerda confessed were improvements. She and her husband shared this hobby; in fact, it was the chief thing they had in common.

They looked almost lovelike as they strolled off along the terrace. Gerda watched them with tearful eyes; she was not perfect, only a sweet and lovable daughter of Eve. No efforts could have made her hide the deep resentment against her stepmother. Poor child! she was too artless to guess how she injured her own cause. What could a warm-hearted, impatient girl do pitched in warfare against an accomplished woman of the world, of perfect tact, and a real talent for diplomacy? Simple truth was a bad weapon to oppose to all the arrows in Lady Ducie's quiver.

Gerda never thought her conduct would appear to her father in an unamiable light—never guessed that her limp dress, disconsolate



face, and generally injured air would suffer in comparison with Lady Ducie's exquisite toilet and ready smile. She made no attempt to go, and don a more becoming attire; she just sat disconsolately watching the terrace steps by which her father must presently retrace his path.

At last she saw the pony-carriage come round. Punctual to a moment Lord Ducie and his wife appeared. Gerda saw him hand her stepmother to her seat, wrap her in the soft rug, and give the word of command to the boy-groom. A wild sensation of relief seized her as she watched the little carriage out of sight, then she sprang forward to meet her father on the terrace.

And his first greeting was a reproof.

"Still in that hideous wrapper, Gerda? I should have thought you might contrive to be dressed by eleven o'clock."

The tears started to her eyes.

"I have been watching for you, papa; I wanted to speak to you."

Something in the tone touched him. He bent and kissed her.

"Why wouldn't you go to Pierpoint Hall? It was not kind to refuse."

"Nobody wanted me."

"The Pierpoints wanted you; and it was surely a slight to your mother to refuse to make the visit in her company."

"Papa, why do you talk like that?"

He sighed.

"Gerda, long ago people used to tell me I was spoiling you, that the life we led together was not adapted to make you a true, tender-hearted woman. Don't let me think those warnings have come true."

"Papa!"

"It seems to me I have lost my bright, sunshiny daughter and got some jealous, discontented young lady in her place."

"Papa!"

"Can you deny you are changed, dear?"

"And who has changed me? Who poisons your mind against me? Who would gladly, if she could, drive me from my home? Papa, you never spoke an unkind word to me in your life until you brought that woman to Netherton Chase."

"Hush!"

"It is quite true."

"Hardly; besides, you forget two things. That woman, as you call her, is my wife, and the Chase is her home as well as yours."

Gerda grew very pale; she had not expected this. She had fancied if only she could get her father to herself their old affection must sweep down all barriers between them. She had believed that he repented his second marriage. His words hardly agreed with her theory.

"Then let the Chase be hers and send me away. I don't care where I go, I don't care what becomes of me; nothing matters if you have ceased to love me."

"Ceased to love you!" In an instant his arms were round her, her head pillowed on his heart. "My child, how could you think so? Gerda, don't you know I would give my life willingly if only it secured your happiness?"

"I am not happy," she said, sorrowfully. "Oh, papa! why did you bring her here? There has been nothing but misery since. She hates me, and she will never rest until she has turned your heart against me and made it all her own. Papa, you know it is true."

"You are mistaken, Gerda. I don't think Lady Ducie is the tender mother to you I hoped she would be, but I am sure she means to be a kind friend. She is rather young to stand in your mother's place; and, Gerda, if she has not quite succeeded in her part, what about yours? Do you think you have given her a daughter's obedience?"

Gerda blushed hotly.

"I was so surprised at her coming."

"Granted. But can't you see the suddenness of our marriage, and your own ignorance of it beforehand, were both my fault, not hers."

"I meant to behave well to her, but—"

"Your natures are not in harmony, I can see that. But, Gerda, you who pride yourself on your good taste, do you think it courteous to be always quoting your high birth and your position as a Ducie of Netherton when you know perfectly my wife can boast of no long line of ancestors, and that the only relation she has works hard for his living?"

Gerda flushed.

"I never thought of that."

"You must make allowances. In time you will get on better."

"And Mr. Ward?"

"What has he to do with it?"

"You heard what Lady Ducie said last night; the cruel scorn, the taunts, she heaped upon me."

"But I think you provoked them."

"Papa!"

"Laurence Ward is a great favourite of Julia's, she espouses his cause, as such. I think he is quite her equal in point of birth, so that, doubtless, all the disparagement you heaped upon him she took for herself."

Gerda was not convinced.

"Papa."

"What is it, dear?"

"You will let me go away. You will promise to find me another home?"

"Away from me?"

She shuddered.

"Something seems to tell me the old happy times can never come back again. Papa, I have a strange presentiment that if I stay at Netherton trouble will come of it."

Trouble did come of it sure enough, but in a way undreamed of by Lord Ducie, after a kind far beyond Gerda's wildest fears.

"How long have we been home, Gerda?"

"You have been married almost four months," said Gerda, with painful exactitude.

"Then promise me to remain patiently at the Chase until the anniversary of our home-coming? If, after a year's trial you find you and my wife cannot live harmoniously together, I pledge myself to find you another home; only, Gerda, you must honestly try to put away your prejudices, and do your best to learn to like Lady Ducie."

"I shall never like her."

"Why not?"

"I don't know," she said, slowly. "I couldn't put it into words. I couldn't make you understand, only I know within myself it would take a miracle to make me and Lady Ducie friends."

"But you have promised to try, and like her!"

"Not just that, papa. I have promised to try and keep the peace until next July. It is a long time, and I would far rather go away now, but I cannot refuse you. You have my word. I will try and bear my fate until July."

He smiled.

"I am sure you will be happier for giving in to my wishes."

She shook her head.

"I don't think so."

"Gerda!"

"I don't expect ever to be happy again. Nurse Brown says I am born to trouble, and that anyone can see it by looking into my eyes."

"Nurse Brown is an idiot."

"She is a dear old thing, and as superstitious as a witch."

"So that she doesn't infect you with her superstition I have no objection."

"But, papa, she has a pack of greasy old cards, and she likes to tell my fortune, and sometimes she reads the lines of my hand."

"What does she find there?"

"It frightens me. I won't let her tell me often, but of course it's not true."

"Of course not, but what nonsense does she tell you?" persisted Lord Ducie, who, in spite of his boasted incredulity, seemed very eager for an answer.

"She says that I am the child of sorrow, and I was cradled in tears."

"That's your past, not your future, Gerda."

Gerda half shivered.

"A great danger threatens me. Where I seem safest there is most to fear. I am to be a fugitive, and a prisoner; I am to die, but not be buried, and true love is to restore me to life and happiness."

Lord Ducie was laughing immoderately from sheer relief. If the old nurse had mentioned some such peril as poverty or disgrace he might have feared her prophecy; but a string of ills was too ridiculous.

"She must be in her dotage."

"She quite believes it."

"Do you?"

"No—only—"

"Only she is making you as superstitious as herself. My dear child, just think sensibly. It is a wild enough idea to imagine you a fugitive or a prisoner, but for you to die and not be buried is just as impossible as that love, powerful as it is, could restore anyone from death to life and happiness. Depend upon it old nurse has imagined a new version of the old story of the sleeping beauty."

Gerda was comforted. She had had the long-desired interview with her father, and if she had not gained all she hoped she had at least obtained a truce to her troubles. Lord Ducie's word was his bond.

## CHAPTER VIII.

GERDA knew now only eight months remained of her present life. Next July, if she were still unhappy at Netherton Chase, her father would find her a new home, where, if she missed his constant companionship, she would, at least, be free from the stepmother she so dreaded and disliked.

She meant to keep her part of the agreement faithfully; and so, when Lord Ducie was busy with his agent, she went upstairs, plaited her beautiful hair in soft Grecian coils, twisted them gracefully round her slender head, and chose from her wardrobe a soft dress of olive green velvet which fitted her slender figure to a nicety, and showed the shape of her pretty rounded arms and the smallness of her waist. Thus attired, a silver arrow in her hair, she stood on the terrace steps waiting for her father.

"Gerda!"

She looked up. A deep colour flashed her cheek. It was not Lord Ducie who stood at her side, but a younger, stronger man, with a bronzed face and stalwart figure—a gentleman and an Englishman every inch of him, with the open Ducie brow and a strange deep tenderness in his eyes.

"You have come back!"

It was Iva, her only kinsman, him she had met in the chestnut-walk on the evening when the first shadow had fallen across her young life.

"I reached England last week, but I could not get down until this morning."

"Are you at Pierpoint Hall?"

"I shall go there soon. My first visit is to the Chase. I wanted to see how things had gone with you. I heard a strange report, and I could not rest until I knew if it was true."

"What did you hear?"

"That you had a stepmother."

"Who hates me," finished Gerda, abruptly.

"Not that! Oh! surely not that?"

"Perhaps it is wrong to say so. I only know her coming has taken all the joy and brightness out of my life. Papa and I were just all the world to each other; now I stand alone."

"Not alone, Gerda; I am with you."

"But—"

"You promised me your friendship once; be sure—"

He broke off hastily. Lord Ducie was coming towards them.

"Papa," said Gerda, with her old bright smile, "this is our cousin, Iva Ducie, Uncle Ralph's grandson. Won't you welcome him to Netherton?"

"With all my heart!" taking the young

man's hand, and speaking almost solemnly in his earnestness. "My boy, the quarrel which began before we were born cannot prevent our being friends. I am only too glad Ralph Ducie has left a descendant to whom I can give a kinsman's greeting. The old feud may be buried now in the dim, shadowy past, and we will only remember that you and I are the last of the good old name."

"I was always proud of the name," said Iva, simply. "It was a great regret to me I could not stay longer in the summer; I was so sorry to miss you."

"Gerda told me of the meeting. Come indoors. When did you arrive? What have you been doing with yourself?"

"I have just returned from a voyage. I love the sea dearly; but I am tired of a wandering life, and next June I mean to retire from the service, and settle down."

"But you can spare us a short visit now? You ought to learn to love the Chase."

"It would not be difficult. I could spend a week with you gladly, Lord Ducie, only—"

"Only?"

"You have a wife. Would an uninvited guest be agreeable to the mistress of the Chase?"

"Decidedly. Lady Ducie delights in company. I shall send down to the inn for your portmanteau, and now come in to lunch. My wife is at Pierpoint Hall, so you must accept Gerda as your hostess till her return."

In an hour's time Bertram and his young cousin were friends. The weary, world-tossed man was delighted with the fresh, outspoken young sailor. He felt thankful that he had found a kinsman whom, if a day of trouble dawned for her, he could trust to befriend his child.

My lady came home at four, and was introduced to Mr. Ducie. Gerda decided she would resent his arriving in her absence, and treat him cavalierly. Nothing of the kind. Julia showed herself a perfect hostess. She received Iva with friendly warmth; hoped he would spare them as many days as possible, and actually praised Gerda's choice when she heard what rooms had been allotted him.

Her manner throughout the evening was charming. She never obtruded herself on the conversation; she was gentle and attentive to her husband; kind and elder sisterlike to Gerda, and to Iva Ducie a thoughtful, well-intentioned hostess. The keenest critic, the most determined fault-finder, could have found nothing to blame in my lady's conduct.

"She is very beautiful!"

It was the next morning. Gerda and Iva were walking over to Pierpoint Hall. Lady Ducie had herself planned the excursion, and even accompanied them part of the way. She was out of sight and hearing now, and Iva took the opportunity—the first he had had—to express the approval of her appearance.

"Very."

"Don't you like her, Gerda?"

"I can't. Iva, is it jealousy or envy, or what? I have tried in vain to conquer it—I have tried to force myself to like her—but I can't."

"It is not jealousy or envy, of that I am quite certain," he said, quickly.

"Then what is it?"

"I don't know. Gerda, such a strange dream happened to me last night. Would it frighten you to hear it?"

"I should like you to tell it me."

"I thought I was walking in the chestnut avenue when I came face to face with Lady Ducie. In her arms she carried something heavily covered with a shawl. She did not seem to see me; though I spoke to her she did not answer. A strange feeling came to me that I must stay, and see what she was carrying. I followed her till she came to a large, square hole, just at the curve of the path which separates your father's property from Sir James Pierpoint's. Gerda," stopping suddenly, "have I frightened you? You look so white."

"I am not frightened."

"Shall I go on?"

"Please. Perhaps I ought to tell you it is only an old superstition. My father has always laughed at it, and never allowed it to be mentioned before him; but it is strange that you who never even heard of the superstition should dream of it."

"What is it?"

"That just in the spot you mention, exactly by the curve where the Ducie property ends, there appears suddenly at long intervals a large, square hole just as you describe."

"Gerda!"

"My father never speaks of it; my old nurse believes in it firmly. She says the hole appears when any trouble threatens the family. It comes without any human agency, keeps open a few hours—sometimes a few days—then closes again in the same mysterious fashion. It is the true prophet of evil."

"Child, surely you don't believe it?"

Her teeth were chattering.

"I don't know. Nurse Brown has told me about it so often, but I never quite believed it came. I thought she fancied it."

"Of course she does."

"If she fancied it how should you dream of it, Iva."

"I mustn't tell you my dream since it frightens you."

"Indeed you must. Why, Iva, even if I am silly enough to think I should be frightened if I saw the hole I am not quite so foolish as to be alarmed because you dreamed of it."

"My lady waited before the hole," went on Iva; and he spoke with such eagerness that it seemed to Gerda more as though he were describing something he had actually seen and witnessed than narrating a simple dream. "She waited some minutes, then she put down her bundle and looked anxiously round, almost as though she wanted to be sure no one was about to see her. She was in evening dress, and in the moonlight she looked like some lovely vision of the night."

"What had she on?"

"I never could describe dress," objected Iva. "Men don't know how. It was something very thin, like lace or gauze, and it was black, sprinkled over with silver stars. Her neck and arms were bare, and she had crimson flowers in her hair. I remember shuddering, because they were the colour of blood."

"And what did she do next?"

"Secure as she thought from prying eyes she removed the shawl that covered her burden. She raised it in her arms and stood ready to fling it into the hole. The moonlight fell full and clear upon the dark mass she held. I saw as in a flash of lightning that it was a human form, and that the face was yours."

He held Gerda's hand in his. He waited till the beatings of her heart grew quieter before he continued his narrative.

"It was only a dream," he said, soothingly.

"I might never have given it a second thought but for your telling me you could not like Lady Ducie, and asking me what caused your aversion to me."

"But finish the dream," pleaded Gerda. "There must have been something more."

"Very little. I longed to spring forward and snatch you from her grasp, but I was spellbound. I stood there, Gerda, to all appearance in full possession of all my vigour, and yet I could not move a foot. I could not find voice to cry out. It was torture to me, but I was obliged to remain motionless. It was only a dream, Gerda; but, oh! how I suffered!—Pray Heaven in my waking hours I may never know such agony as to stand by and see you wronged, myself helpless to save you. With one toss of her arms my lady flung you into the yawning hole. It closed as though by magic, and I awoke."

"And were you impressed then?"

"I thought it an evil nightmare. I had naturally thought a good deal of your relations

with your stepmother, and had fancied they were not very harmonious. When I was dressed I had quite got over my impressions of trouble from my vision. Honestly I believe they would never have returned to my mind but for your own remark."

"That I did not like Lady Ducie?"

"No, the mere non-liking is natural enough in your position. It was when you listened to me and said you had fought against it, and striven to root it out, when you asked me what caused it. Only then my dream flashed across my mind."

"And that explained it?"

"No, but it reminded me that there is such a thing as Heaven-given instinct to preserve us from peril. I am not superstitious, as it is generally understood, but I do believe that at times Heaven specially interferes to save us from danger, to guide us from things hurtful, and to lead us to where we are greatly needed. I could never laugh at a presentiment. I never had one but once, and that was years ago. I had an unusually good offer from the captain of the *Egyptian* to sail with him as fourth lieutenant. I liked him extremely; the ship was a fine one, and one or two of my friends were among the crew; but after the arrangements were almost made a strange presentiment fastened on me that ill would follow my joining the *Egyptian*. I was well laughed at for my scruples. I had to bear an enormous amount of ridicule, but in the end I chanced to be laid up at the time of the ship's sailing, which put the matter on another footing. I gave my sprained arm to the captain as my reason for not going with him; and a week after the ship left Plymouth I heard that she had gone down with every soul on board."

Gerda started.

"How terrible!"

"You see now why I believe in presentiments, and I think this strange dialike and aversion you feel towards your stepmother may be sent to warn you against too great an intimacy with her. Gerda, she is very beautiful; she has shown me only kindness, and yet something within me rises up in horror at the bare idea of your ever being on confidential terms with Lady Ducie. I seem to know by instinct she is not a good woman."

"I do not think she is, but—"

"But what, dear?"

"Netherton is my home, and to leave the Chase would seem like exile."

"To leave it alone; but how if you went to someone you loved, you fondly and yearned for you as a wanderer does for home?"

"But—"

"It's quite true, my darling; I love you with all my heart. I want you to give me leave to ask your father for this little hand."

And she? Every feeling of her nature was stirred to its depths. She loved him dearly, and when she had put her hand in his and gave him the permission he asked for, it seemed to Gerda the world had suddenly grown fair.

The telling of Iva's dream, the telling of their mutual love, had taken time. They had lingered quite an hour at the rustic bench before they remembered Pierpoint Hall. Then they rose and walked on a little hurriedly, not wishing to reach their good old friends when they were in the middle of lunch.

They had reached the junction of Lord Ducie's and Sir James's lands. Iva was talking brightly of the future when Gerda laid one hand tremblingly on his arm.

"Look!" she breathed.

And there, just on the boundary curve, was a large square hole, deep and yawning, as the grave to which in Iva's dream my lady had consigned her stepdaughter.

(To be continued.)

\* A firm faith is the best divinity; a good life is the best philosophy; a clear conscience is the best policy, and temperance the best physio.



## BUT NOT OUR HEARTS.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

VANE went home in a highly-contented frame of mind, at peace with himself and all the world. He was doing well, getting on swimmingly, and if this new venture turned up trumps, why, there was no knowing what mightn't happen.

After all, The Rest was a little dull. Towards evening, at dinner, and after, he began to crave for someone to talk to, and why shouldn't that someone be a wife? There was no reason whatever why the companion of his solitude should not bear that relationship to him, always providing that her pockets were well and heavily lined. That must be a *sine quid non*.

As he had said to Lady Dorothy, at his time of life a man looked for something beyond mere good looks—looked for something more substantial and lasting. And a silver mine—well, that was substantial, and Mrs. Davidson was anything but a plain woman, and then she was chatty, and agreeable, and amusing, so it wouldn't be a bad investment altogether.

He longed for wealth—great wealth—that would enable him to fling money about freely; to travel, to yacht, and keep some good hunters, and racers, and open house; play the great man, and receive homage and adulation.

He knew he wouldn't personally benefit much by Ruby's grand marriage. Being father-in-law to an Earl would be a feather in his cap, but there the advantage would end. It was not likely his second daughter, once married, would trouble her head about his wants or necessities; she was not that sort of woman, and Mount Severn's semi-idiotcy saved him from the raids of his rapacious relative-elect. He either did not, or stolidly would not, understand hints and innuendos.

As to Mr. Spragg, Vane knew well—though not a word on the subject had passed between the two men—that his marriage was a failure, an utter, failure and that beyond the four hundred a year, and an occasional dinner, he would not get much out of him, and the dinners even would be very occasional, for the mistress of Temple Dene, he was aware, was not anxious to see him often; and her husband, his eyes rendered very keen by his love for her, was not likely to invite anyone to the house whom he thought was in the least degree objectionable to her.

Under these circumstances, matrimony was his best card, and he intended to play it, and win the game of wealth and ease. So he exerted himself to a wonderful degree, and nearly drove Jenny and the housekeeper mad, giving directions and orders, and then countermanding them and giving others, in his desperate endeavours to have all things *comme il faut* for the reception of the fair widow.

He managed to make the rooms look well, with heaps of roses and gay blossoms, and the luncheon, spread in what had originally been the drawing-room, was quite dainty and tasty.

Bob, Bert, and Blackie he packed off to the den, with strict orders not to appear till they were sent for, and then stood waiting the arrival of his guests. They came ere long—Mrs. Davidson, Opal, Billie, and, to his intense astonishment, Ruby and her intended.

"Thought I'd come over with the others, and say good-bye to the old place," she said, nonchalantly. "I darsay I shall not have time to pay another visit."

"Very glad to see you, my dear," returned her father, graciously, kissing her for the Earl's edification, and offering the same courtesy to his other daughter; but she drew back with an unmistakable gesture of repugnance; and Vane, feeling somewhat disconcerted, turned to the widow, and made her some very civil speeches, at which she actually blushed.

"What a picturesque place!" she cried, determined to be pleased with everything.

"I am glad you like it."

"I more than like it. It is charming. So rural, so peaceful-looking."

"Quite wustie," struck in Mount Severn, wishing to distinguish himself; "all woses and honeysuckle."

"Just the spot for a sylvan idyl, isn't it, Mrs. Spragg?"

Mrs. Davidson looked at her host as she spoke, so she did not see the spasm of pain that contracted Opal's features, nor the mist that dimmed her brilliant eyes.

"Just so," she acquiesced, quietly.

"Where are the boys, dad?" asked Ruby.

"I have sent them to the school-room (he never called it the 'den') to be out of the way."

"Are they not to lunch with us?"

"No, they might be troublesome."

"I don't think they will be that, and I wish them to lunch with us."

Opal for once looked her father full in the face, and his eyes sank beneath the contemptuous scorn of hers.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Vane. I want to see your boys," chimed in his charmer.

"Since you wish it, then," and he beckoned to the lads, who stood with their noses flattened against the window of the den.

In an instant it was thrown up, and they raced across to Opal, hanging on to her and Billie, and kissing then vigorously until sharply called to order by their father, when they remembered their good manners, and greeted the strangers.

They were delighted to hear they were to lunch with the others, and whispered so to their sister, as they seated themselves as near to her as they could—Blackie on her right, Bertie on her left; then Billie, then Bobbie, who wished to grumble, but didn't dare to do so, because he was not at her side, and who presently consoled himself by interchanging confidences with the twin-brother he had not seen for many months.

"Handsome youths," whispered Mrs. Davidson, approvingly.

"Do you think so?" muttered her host, in the same key, as he helped her to lobster salad.

"Yes. Your children are remarkable for their great good looks. I am not surprised at that, though," she added, a minute later, "considering who their father is," and she favoured him with an admiring glance.

"You are flattering me," she smiled, well-pleased at her florid compliments.

"I could not flatter you."

I hope you never will, that you will always be candid and open with me."

"You need not fear I always shall be," she assured him, with an amorous sigh.

She was thinking of love and sentiment, he of the silver mine.

Ruby was much amused at this eye-play, and she watched the matured lovers through her long lashes, as she toyed with the chicken on her plate, and made monosyllabic replies to the Earl's remarks, wondering what scheme her amiable parent had in his head with regard to the full-blown widow, whose many debts and impecuniosity were common talk, and known to all her friends and acquaintances, who marvelled how she got the handsome dresses she wore, the costly lace, and threw a doubt on the genuineness of the splendid diamonds with which she decked her fair throat and arms at ball and *soirée*, saying that had they been real stones her hungry creditors would never have left her in undisturbed possession of them.

There was a good deal of truth in this, and as Miss Vane remembered about them she felt more and more puzzled to understand her father's tactics.

Opal, on the other hand, took not the slightest notice of what was going on. She was fully occupied with the boys. Her sad eyes rested on them lovingly, and she felt glad they were so happy, and looked so well. She forgot her heavy sorrow for a while, in the pleasure of the hour; and later on, when she and they retired to the den for a confidential chat, for a while she brightened into something of her former self.

"I say, sis," said Bob, leaning affectionately on her shoulder, "you're no end of a swell now!"

"Am I?"

"Yes. What a fine gown!" touching the lace and muslin gently.

"This is a very simple one," she smiled.

"Yes," piped Billie; "you should see her when she goes to a ball. She is fine."

"What does she wear, young'un?" questioned Bert.

"Silk, and satin, and gold, and velvet, and pearls," returned the child, looking up with widely-open eyes.

"Not altogether, chick," she expostulated, ruffling the soft, golden curls from his brow.

"You would be smart if you wore them all at once."

"She wears satin, and velvet, and pearls all at once," declared the little fellow stoutly.

"You're fibbing," said Bobbie.

"No," interfered Mr. Spragg, "he is telling the truth."

"My! You must be fine then!"

"Well, I suppose I am when I have got it on. It if a black velvet dress, with a white satin petticoat embroidered with pearls."

"How grand!"

"It is well to be you," laughed Bert carelessly.

"Ah!" she said, drawing a quick breath. "Is that what you think?"

"Of course," he answered. "You have everything you can possibly desire, haven't you?"

"Yes," she assented, adding to herself, "as far as luxuries and fine clothes go."

And then Spragg's a decent sort of fellow, not like that idiot out there," and he nodded towards the garden, where Ruby sat in an easy chair, under the spreading leaves of a chestnut, while the Earl lay stretched at her feet, sucking the top of his cane, and staring at nothing.

"His lack of brains won't matter," put in Blackie. "Our beloved sister has enough for both."

"True," agreed the other. Still, if I were a girl I'd marry a man, not a hybrid sort of creature, or remain single all the days of my life."

"No you wouldn't, Bert," said Opal, bitterly. "If you were a girl you'd do as most of us do, sell yourself for a title, or money, or a home."

"Not I. I'd rather work the fingers off my hands than be wife to a thing like that," and he waved his hands towards the reclining nobleman.

"Women can't work."

"Pooh! What are you talking about. The emancipated female of the present day can do anything, from sawing your leg off down to keeping accounts in a butcher's shop."

"We are not all emancipated and useful females," she said with a sigh, thinking of her own helplessness.

"No, thank goodness. I hope when I go to look for a spouse that she won't be able to do anything save look pretty."

"Not a useful helpmate. You will want to be a rich man in order to have the power to gratify this whim."

"I shall be," he announced confidently.

"And tell me," she continued, with sudden interest, "what are you going to be?"

"A lawyer. Mr. Spragg says I may be one if I like."

"Ah! And you, Blackie?"

"A soldier," he returned, promptly, squaring his shoulders, and drawing himself up. "There are only two professions that I think fit for a gentleman, the navy or army, and I shall choose the latter."

"Have you asked permission?" queried Bert.

"Not as yet. But I am sure Mr. Spragg won't refuse, and, if he does, Opal must make him give his consent."

She turned her head away at that.

"Washy says I'm to be a country gentleman," cried Billie.

"And who may 'Washy' be?" inquired Bob.

"Mr. Spragg."

"Well, young 'un, you're rather cool, aren't you?"

"No. He told me to call him that."

"Oh! I see."

"And he says he will always give me plenty of money, so that I need never work."

"You're in luck."

"Ain't I?" he queried, gravely, and then dashed out of the window after a butterfly, closely followed by Bert and Bobbie.

"I hope he won't tire himself," said Opal, anxiously watching him, as he raced about with the others.

"He'll be all right," said Blackie, soothingly.

"He looks ever so much better."

"Do you really think so?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes, really."

"Still, he is far from strong, and if he overheats himself, and then gets chilled, the consequences may be serious."

"Shall I call him in?"

"No," she answered, hesitatingly. "Let him remain out. He seems to be enjoying himself so much."

"That's as, as I never thought he would a year ago, and that he owes to you; and we, too, owe you a debt of gratitude for all you have done for us. The future smiles now for us, before she frowned blackly," and Blackie, who had more heart and feeling than the others, put his arm round her waist and kissed her tenderly.

As she felt that caress, and saw his happy face, she felt more content and resigned than she had since her wedding day.

"I only hope you are happy," he went on. "You deserve to be, for all you have done for us."

"Ah! we needn't talk about that," she said, forcing a smile to her lips. "It satisfies me to know that you are all well off;" and then, fearing to prolong the conversation, which had taken an awkward turn, she went out, and joined Ruby and her lover; and Mr. Vane appearing soon after with Mrs. Davidson, from the retirement of the library—where they had spent the afternoon pouring over papers and legal-looking documents—they refreshed themselves with iced coffee, and, bidding adieu to the inmates of The Rest, drove back to Westcourt.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

BILLIE'S romp with his brothers resulted in a feverish night, and the next day he showed symptoms of a severe cold, which filled Opal with alarm and anxiety. Knowing how delicate the little fellow was, she always dreaded that a cold would bring to a climax the consumptive tendency he had shown.

So she nursed, and coddled, and cosseted him, and shut him up in her own room, with heaps of toys, and books, and spent every moment she could with him, and regretted that they could not at once return to Temple Dene. This was not possible, for Lady Dorothy had asked Spragg to stay at Westcourt, and play the part of host to the many guests assembled there, as she did not want them to leave before the wedding; and she was going up to her town-house for a few days, to superintend the purchase of Ruby's trousseau, which was an exceedingly important matter.

She was not, as Opal had been, an indifferent bride—far from it.

She took the keenest interest in everything down to the smallest details, and was as eager as her aunt to spend money, and have everything magnificent and costly. Her wedding, she determined, should be remembered in the county for many a long day. It should stand out as something particularly brilliant and festive in the annals of Dene, and leave all other bridal far behind.

Spragg willingly assented to her ladyship's

request, and did his best to supply her place. Truth to tell, he was hardly sorry to remain there. The gulf that yawned between him and his wife was not so painfully apparent at Westcourt as it was at Temple Dene. Surrounded by guests from morning till night, having no *l'été-d'été*, being engaged trying to amuse the gay butterflies, left him little leisure to dwell on his disappointment.

At his own house the wreck of all his hopes and aspirations was forced upon him with unpleasant distinctness. He had longed for a fine old English country mansion, a gallery of portraits, rooms with antique heirlooms, a retinue of family servants, hoary-headed, dignified and respectable, and he had all these.

Temple Dene was charming in every respect, the portraits famous, the heirlooms many, and as for his servants they were simply perfection. Could there be a more stately-looking personage in the capacity of butler than Benson, a more capable one as housekeeper than Mrs. Marshall, a more antique-looking head-groom than Jim Ferrars, while Plague, Pestilence, and Famine were model maids! And yet—and yet, despite that he was master of all this, and much more besides, he was not happy.

He had lost faith in his belief of "stickin' to a thin." He stuck to his idea of marrying a lovely girl, and thinking she might ultimately grow to care for him, and it had turned out a failure—an utter failure. He could not disguise that unpleasant fact from himself. His married life was a sort of Barmecide's feast. The pleasures he hoped to grasp faded into thin air as he stretched out his hand to take them. They receded from him, as a Will-o'-the-Wisp recedes from the wanderer, lost in marshy regions.

He could find no actual fault with his wife. She was obedient—disagreeably so, he thought—invariably polite, both in public and private; but so cold, so frozen to him. Those sweet lips that he had dreamt of clinging to his in wifely fondness never responded to his kiss, the shapely arms were never twined round his throat, nor the sunny head laid lovingly on his breast.

He might have been a stranger to her for all the familiarity or affection she showed; and then it tortured him to feel the involuntary shudder she gave when he took her in his arms—for he loved her, as few women are loved.

What mattered it that his face was yellow, and wrinkled, and hideous? He could love as well, ay, better than many men who are as handsome as Adonis, with more force, passion, fidelity, and intenseness.

It was well for Opal that, because he was not on particularly affectionate terms with her, he did not think it necessary to be on particularly affectionate terms with any other women; for there were plenty of frivolous and fast enough at Westcourt to strike up a tender friendship with the rich American for the sake of presents, &c., had he shown the least desire to enter into what they termed "platonics." But he didn't. Quite on the contrary. He had eyes only for his wife, and while playing the part of host to the frail, fair dames, never said or did anything that they could construe into an invitation to act as they were quite ready to do. He would not humble the woman who was his wife by such conduct. In fact, it did not occur to him to do so for an instant.

He honoured as much as he adored her, and found excuses for her treatment of and coldness to him. She was more beautiful to him than any of the others. He felt he would rather look for five minutes at her amber tress-crowned head and dark-lashed, sapphire eyes than stare for a year at the freely-displayed charms of the women who were willing to supplant her at the least signal from him.

To do him justice, he was unconscious of their attentions and intentions towards him, never imagining for an instant that their marked civility had an end and object.

"You are not conceited," said Ruby, with a sarcastic smile, the night before the wedding, as she strolled in the garden with him after having rescued him from the joint attentions of Mrs. Davidson, who thought it was good policy to have two strings to her bow, and Tim Bevoir, who grew more desperate day by day, and prayed heaven nightly that he might divorce or be divorced by his wife, leaving the coast clear for her, and one or two others more amorous than wise.

"Conceited!" he echoed, with an expression of profound astonishment. "I have nothing to be conceited about."

"Indeed! Those fair dames who had you in their midst seemed to think differently."

"They were only civil because they hope to get invited often to Temple Dene. I guess they know that we shall entertain frequently now."

"Is that all?"

"Of course. They couldn't possibly care to talk to a fellow with a face like mine!" he said, bitterly.

"Good looks are not everything," returned Miss Vane, with a pitying look at the man beside her, for she knew and understood his bitterness. "Good qualities, common sense, kindness, are better than physical beauty in my opinion."

"Most women don't think so."

"Most women are fools."

"That is a sweeping assertion."

"It may be; still it is a true one. I mean, of course, that they are fools with regard to men. The most sensible, the cleverest, have their weak point, and it almost invariably takes the form of a man."

"Perhaps you are right."

"I knew I am."

"You don't share this general weakness," he continued, looking at her with some of his old keenness.

"How do you know?" she asked, with a laugh that was somewhat embarrassed.

"I judge by the marriage you are making."

"That is no criterion."

"I calculate it is a very good one."

"Not at all. I suppose I share this weakness with the rest of my sex, only I am a little different from them."

"In what way?"

"I had the strength of mind to master it and not let it master me."

"Ah! I see. Well, I hope you will be happy," he said, earnestly thinking of his own domestic misfortunes. "You have my best wishes, and there is the present that has been so long in coming," and, putting a packet in her hand, he turned away and left her before she could thank him.

Ruby turned into one of the arbours, and slowly undid the packet. After removing many coverings she came to a purple velvet case; touching a spring the cover flew back and displayed a magnificent diamond necklace that lay on its rich bed, and sparkled brilliantly in the moonlight.

"How kind of him," she murmured, lifting the costly gems, and flashing them to and fro. "He will have my best thanks for this. It is one of the handsomest presents I have received," and replacing it carefully in the case she rose to go in.

But as she got up a shadow fell athwart the strip of moonlight, and she saw a man standing at the entrance to the arbour.

"Who—who is it?" she asked, tremblingly, a chill fear at her heart.

"Has it come to this already?" returned a hoarse voice, that, despite its change, she recognised as Jack Rainham's. "Won't you know me?"

"Mr. Rainham!" she ejaculated, in some dismay.

"Yes, Mr. Rainham," he mimicked. "You used to call me Jack."

"When we were children."

"And lately too."

"I think not."

"Have you forgotten the *filé* at Temple Dene?" he questioned, drawing near.



"No-o," she stammered.

"Nor what we said then?"

He was bending over her, she saw the necessity for self-command, and recovered calmness, to all outward appearances, by a violent effort.

"We talked a good deal then. It would be impossible for me to remember all we said," she rejoined, coolly.

"I don't want you to remember all, only some."

"And what is the some? I remember we talked about 'instinct' and 'knowledge of the world.'"

"Nothing else?"

"Really I can't tell you. It is rather a long time to look back on."

"Can you forget so soon?"

"Soon! My dear, Mr. Rainham, what are you talking about?" she demanded, with airy nonchalance.

"I am talking of a night," he said, sternly, "when the woman I was then fool enough to think loved me with all the ardour of her young heart lay in my arms, her lips meeting mine, giving back the kisses I showered down on them while her trembling arms entwined my throat, and her head rested on my breast. Do you understand me now?"

"Yes, I understand," she replied, seeing it was useless to prevaricate.

"And yet you pretend to forget?"

"It is necessary to do so—sometimes."

"Exactly so. It is necessary for the bride-elect of the Earl of Mount Severn to forget the poor devil of a curate with whom she played at making love for pastime. It was cruel sport—death to me."

"Don't be—too—hard," she faltered, touched by the misery on his pallid face. "I—I—did not know you cared so much."

"Cared so much! Care is not the word!" he cried, wildly. "I worship you, adore you. You are more to me than any promise Heaven holds, than any wealth or success this world can give. The passion I bear you permeates every fibre of my being, sways me as a rough wind sways a reed. Did you not guess the depths of my nature when you bound me triumphant to your chariot-wheel? Did you not pause to think for one instant to consider what I might suffer? Were you utterly callous?"

"I was so young," she murmured, half frightened.

"That may be. But you were never like other girls. You knew what you were doing. I was such mean prey, surely you might have spared me? Think what my life will be; so blank, so dull, with never a ray of joy to brighten it. How shall I bear it, how shall I bear it! Oh! Heaven! that I were dead."

He flung his arms out and buried his head in them, while convulsive sobs shook his frame.

"Jack, don't grieve so," said the woman who had wrought this ruin, laying her hand on his shoulder. "I am not worth it, and there are bright days in store for you."

"Not apart from you."

"Yes, yes. You will be happy, you must be happy," she urged.

"And I will," he cried, springing to his feet, and holding out his arms, a glad light shining in his eyes. "With you. Give up this titled lover and his gold, be true to your better instincts, and—me. As my wife you will be happy, and I will work for you as never man worked before. Only say 'yes' to my pleading, only save me and yourself from a deadly sin, for you love me, I know."

"Yes, Jack," she acknowledged, with a curious smile. "I love you."

"Then be true to me."

She made a gesture of dissent. His trying to alter her decision was useless. It was like a ship putting up her helm and running straight at a rock in her way, against which she was bound to come to grief.

"You will not?"

"I cannot. To-morrow I marry the Earl

and enter into all those luxuries and comforts for which I have longed."

"And for which you sacrifice me?"

"If you wish to call it a sacrifice," with a shrug of the shoulders and a curve of that mouth which looked so well qualified for uttering merciless things.

"Don't you?"

"I decline to answer that question."

"And you decline me too?"

"Most certainly."

"Cruel, wicked, heartless woman, my undoing lies at your door. Take that, and that, and that," he hissed, throwing his arms round her and kissing cheek, lips and brow with despairing vehemence. Then flinging her from him he strode out of the arbour.

Ruby fell with such violence that she was stunned for a while, but collecting her scattered senses she crept to the house, and entering by a side door she gained the privacy of her own room in safety, and immediately proceeded to remove her evening robe and don a dressing-gown, determined to plead fatigue if anyone came to ask her to go down again that night.

It wouldn't do, she knew, to show up again. The interview with her discarded lover had been too upsetting. Her face was ghastly and her hands trembled; so when Lady Dorothy's maid came to see her she made an excuse, and retired to rest.

#### CHAPTER XXVIII.

SHE rose refreshed after a good sleep, with no traces of the excitement of the past evening on her blooming face, and submitted herself to the hands of the dressmaker and maids to be attired in her bridal gear.

Very handsome she looked as she came down the church on her father's arm, followed by Billie and baby Scargill, both of whom were gorgeous in crimson plush and point lace, holding her train, the latter staggering and stumbling at every step in a way which made his fond mother's heart quake lest he should trip and damage his celestial nose.

The Earl was a contrast to his bride. Plain, ugly, and insignificant, no one took the trouble to look at him; all eyes were fixed on the lady at his side—a much pleasanter sight, with her sweeping, colourless velvet gown, her orange blossoms, her diamonds, her general magnificence.

"I say, isn't she an awful swell?" murmured Bobbie to Bert as they sat at the breakfast; and he cast eager glances at the great rich cake, like a vast beehive—one of Hill's triumphs.

"Who is 'she,' and don't be vulgar," returned Bert, loftily.

He was getting quite grand now that he had arrived at the dignity of frock coats and high collars, and looked down upon Bob as a "mere child."

"I'm not vulgar, and of course I mean Ruby."

"Then you should say what you mean."

"Never thought she'd look like that when she used to be patching our rags in the den."

"You'd better not think at all," retorted the other, sharply, fearing that the charming dame at his side in pale blue would overhear these unwelcome confidences, "and hold your tongue."

"I say, don't you fancy yourself," muttered Bob, sinking, however, into silence, and watching Blackie, who was devoting himself to another of the bridesmaids, Maud Rainham, with great attention.

The Rainhams couldn't afford to affront the great people; they were too poor to be able to do that, and the living of Dene was in the gift of the possessor of Temple Dene, so they had come to the wedding, Maud as bridesmaid, though they rather more than suspected that Ruby had treated Jack badly.

Of course, he was not present. He was lying face downwards in the tawny bracken, that grew knee deep in Evesham woods, with clenched hands, and lips that bled from the

bite of the teeth that set so fiercely on them, wrestling with his grief and anguish.

He knew he must go, leave the old life and the old place. He could not stay. The torture of seeing her another man's wife would be unbearable.

A week later he took his broken heart to a distant land, and tried, in a dangerous and adventurous life, spent amongst the dingy natives, to forget his wrecked and crushing sorrow.

Brilliant though Ruby's bridal was, Opal was unfeignedly thankful when it was all over. And she sat beside her husband driving back to Temple Dene, with Billie on her knee, discouraging glibly about Baby Scargill's many mistakes and utter incapability to conduct himself properly at such an affair.

Master Billie was rosy, and looking particularly beautiful and bright, but Opal saw the colour in his soft cheeks was too brilliant, almost hectic, and his voice was hoarse. He had not quite recovered from his cold, and she feared he might have caught a fresh one.

She consulted Mrs. Marshall on her arrival home, and together the two women concocted sundry warm drinks and gruel, which Billie, much to his disgust, had to swallow, he protesting he was quite well, and didn't want "the nasty stuff," but his objections were not listened to.

He was only petted and soothed and coddled to any extent by all the household, including Mr. Spragg, who looked at him with anxious eyes every time he coughed—a cough that struck terror into Opal's heart.

Linton was called in, prescribed for him, said they need not alarm themselves, only take care of him, and he would get on all right, and his sister had to be content with that.

Mr. Spragg gave two or three big dinners, one in honour of the bride and her groom, who had returned from their honeymoon and settled down at Severn Hall, which was thirty miles from Temple Dene in the next county, and a *fit*, all of which were great successes, and then one morning he received a letter calling him to America on business.

"I shall have to go to Boston," he said, looking at his wife, who sat facing him at the breakfast-table. "This letter tells me my presence is urgently needed there."

"Yes," she answered.

"I must start the day after to-morrow. Will you come with me?"

"I will—if you wish it," she responded, reluctantly. "But—"

"You'd rather not?" he put in.

"I am anxious about Billie. He is so delicate now."

"And he is more to you than I am, your husband?" he said, with a touch of bitterness.

Mrs. Spragg made no reply to this, only remained with downcast eyes, toying with her spoon. The child was more to her, and she could not tell a lie and say it was not so.

"Well, well!" he went on, after a pause, during which he regarded her wistfully, "I guess I must go alone."

"How long will you be away?" she inquired.

"Gettin' there and back and settlin' this business will take me a month at least, perhaps more. You won't be in a hurry for my return, will you?" he asked, going over and standing beside her.

"I shall be ready to welcome you when you do," she rejoined, coldly, hoping to avert one of those demonstrations of affection which she dreaded.

"With your usual indifference. I suppose there won't be anythin' warmer awaitin' me?"

"I try to do my duty—try to please you," she said, icily.

"That is just it, you 'try.' Now, if you didn't, if you were more spontaneous, I guess matters would come straighter between us."

"I am sorry my behaviour is displeasing to you."

"Don't understand me wrongly," he pleaded, looking lovingly at the averted head. "Only it is so hard sometimes for a man to get nothing of the love he craves for."

"I am sorry," she repeated.  
"Ah!" and dropping the hand he had taken in his he left her, and walked round his estates, envying the poor cottagers he saw, who were richer than he, in that they possessed the love of the woman they called "wife."

Mr. Spragg's absence was a relief to Opal. She flung aside some of her wretchedness, and wandered over the old house she had not dared to explore with her husband—recalling memories of Paul at every spot. Then she was free to spend the whole day with Billie, which she did. Casting aside her matronly dignity she romped with the child, made daisy chains for him and rose crowns, and picniced with him in the woods, inviting the other boys on the last day of their holidays to come too.

And high revel they held in the dim recesses of the leafy woods, where the foliage was just beginning to take bronze and orange tints, and the nuts to ripen, and the bracken to fade; playing hide-and-seek behind the great tree stems, and climbing up in the branches, and doing many other things, one of which was to fall into a brook about three feet deep. Bob fell in first, and pulled Billie in too, and Blackie fished them both out, not before they were wet through though.

Opal was terribly distressed at this accident, this unfortunate ending to a pleasant day, for they were five miles from home, and had walked, and there was no house at which they could get the children's clothes dried.

"Never mind," said Blackie, picking up Billie, and perching him on his shoulder. "I'll go on as fast as I can, and get Marshall to see nurse changes his things. It won't hurt Bob; he is so strong," and he strode off at a great rate, for his little brother was far from heavy, while the others followed as quickly as they could.

They found Billie warm and comfortable in bed with Mrs. Marshall sitting beside him, and his nurse in attendance, and they all hoped no serious illness would result from his ducking.

But these hopes were doomed to disappointment. The child grew feverish and restless as the night wore on, and when Linton, who was sent for, arrived, he looked so grave that Opal telegraphed to London for a celebrated chest doctor, who arrived the next day. His verdict was not favourable, but he commended Linton's treatment, and urged the necessity of keeping the patient well-nourished.

His directions were minutely carried out by Opal in the wretched days of alternate hope and fear that followed, yet they seemed to do little good. Day by day he grew weaker, his pale face paler, save for the hectic flush on the cheek bone, his hands more transparent, and he less inclined for the nourishment which was so necessary for him.

Ruby came to see him, and his father, and Lady Dorothy, and they all in turn tried to comfort Opal, a task which was beyond their power.

"If he dies, Marshall, if he dies what shall I do?" moaned the mistress of Temple Dene, wringing her hands, and glancing at the child who lay so still.

"You mustn't give way," said the faithful soul. "While there's life there's hope."

"But there is so little life in him. I dread, oh! how I dread losing him. He looks worse to-day, don't you think?" she continued.

"No, ma'am. Much the same as he has this past week. I wish, ma'am, you'd go and take a rest. You're quite worn out."

"No, no, Marshall, I won't leave him. You go, though; you are nearly asleep now."

After some persuasion the housekeeper retired, and Opal, kneeling by the bed, poured out her heart in fervent prayer for her darling.

Motionless she remained, as the shadows grew deeper and longer, and the evening closed in.

The clock struck seven; it was time for his medicine, and rousing herself she bent over and spoke softly. He did not stir. There was something peculiarly still about him. She bent lower and saw that he had ceased to breathe, had painlessly passed away.

With a great, tearless sob she sank down and gathered the little wasted form to her breast, pressing her lips to the marble brow, the closed, long-fringed lids, the pale mouth, in an agony of sorrow and regret.

In vain her maid, Mrs. Marshall, and the nurse besought her to come away.

"Leave me," she replied, with a stare of stony despair. "He was all I had in the world."

And something in the awful anguish of that look awed them, and they stole away and left her, with her loved one clasped to her warm bosom.

All through the night she sat there, holding the dead child, speaking to him softly, kissing the stiffened hands, smoothing the curly golden locks from his forehead, touching the cold cheek; and when the morning dawned and they came again, not saying a word, she laid him down gently, and without shedding a single tear left the room and sought the solitude of her own.

Her sacrifice had been of little use to the one she most loved. Death had claimed his young victim.

A madness of despair seized her. What interest had she in life now? Paul was gone, and Billie. Her family were well provided for, Ruby well married; and, besides, there had never been much true intimacy or intercourse between the sisters since Opal's wedding. Ruby was too hard and worldly to be able to enter into her outraged feelings and shattered hopes. It seemed there was no one for her to turn to, and an overwhelming sense of wretchedness and misery possessed her.

Mr. Spragg was quite shocked on his return two days later to see the alteration in his wife, and made some clumsy efforts at condolence, which were received with cold yet gentle repulsion.

She could not take sympathy from him; and he, finding he could not please her that way, sent in a cartload of white flowers and wreaths, stripped the conservatories bare, and had a grand funeral for the little fellow, for which she thanked him as she might have thanked a stranger who tried to win her gratitude, and then shut herself up with her sorrow that she might not see the coffin, and the hearse, and all the panoply of woe.

The next day she was early at the grave, and spent hours there weeping in anguish. She made a regular practice of spending at least a couple of hours every day by the marble cross, that bore only two words, "Little Billie;" and as October drew near its close Mr. Spragg became alarmed at her white face and listless manner; and fearing that she would get ill spending so much time in the damp cemetery, and die like her brother, he interfered, and begged her not to go there.

She looked so wan and delicate, and his fears were so thoroughly aroused, that he consulted Linton, who advised thorough change of air and scene.

Opal was reluctant to leave her home, and the grave under the drooping willow in God's Acre which held her beloved dead, and for a while her husband humoured her; but finding she was becoming more morbid and sorrowful his patience at last gave way, and he carried her off to America, thinking that a visit to that country would be the greatest change she could have.

#### CHAPTER XXIX.

MR. SPRAGG took her first to his "cabin" at Boston. It was a splendid house, replete with every modern luxury and comfort, full of beautiful pictures and art treasures—a place

to excite the admiration of most people; yet its lovely mistress took little heed of the grandeur and magnificence of her surroundings.

"As the earth when leaves are dead,  
As the heart when sleep is sped,  
So the heart when joy is fled."

There was no joy in her heart, only an aching void that nothing could fill, a sense of weariness that never left her. What cared she for the gorgeous entertainments her husband gave in the hope of diverting her from her sorrow? Nothing. They were a misery to her. She did not care for night turned into day, for a ceaseless round of gaiety, for endless receptions, dinners, and dances.

It seemed such a restless, yet monotonous and insincere life; it filled her with ennui. And then the friends he entertained were mostly men who had "made a corner in Eries," "operated in pork," "turned up trumps over Alleghannys," "struck it" in some fashion or other, and who talked of their successes loudly and boastfully in a way which was distasteful to the highly-refined girl.

"You don't look much better for the change," remarked her husband, in a dissatisfied sort of way one morning after a big dinner, at which he had entertained five or six very big fish and their wives—people who had all risen from nothing, and consequently were not very particular as to what they did or said, and showed a charmingly naive disregard for *les convenances*.

"No."

Her monosyllables always annoyed him. He could not gather from them what she meant or wished.

"Do you feel any better?"

"Much the same as I did when we left England."

"I hoped the change would do you good."

"Yes."

"Yes; but my hopes seemed doomed to disappointment. Do you like this place?" he asked, breaking a silence that lasted some minutes.

"Not much."

"It is very gay."

"Too much so to please me."

"Do—do—you mean you don't care to see folk here and go to entertainments?" he demanded, in great surprise.

"Yes."

"Why didn't you tell me this?"

"I did not wish to interfere with your arrangements," she answered, coldly.

"My arrangements are always subject to any alterations you may desire."

"You are kind to say so, but I could not interfere with your pleasure."

"My pleasure," he cried, his sallow face flushing; "do you know so little of me after a year of wedded life not to be aware that my greatest pleasure lies in pleasing you?"

"I was not aware of it," she responded, with unconscious cruelty, for she had never taken the trouble to think about it.

"Then you ought to be," he said, hotly, turning away from her, and walking towards the window, to hide the twitchings of his mouth, which he could not control; her words stabbed him to the heart's core.

"You know," he went on, after a few minutes, during which he managed to recover his composure, "surely you must know that if I had thought gaiety was disagreeable to you I would not have asked a creature into the house."

"I suppose that."

"Then why couldn't you tell me you didn't wish me to do so?"

"I?" she exclaimed, in astonishment.

"Yes, you."

"I should never think of doing such a thing."

"Why not?"

"Because I prefer your doing that which is most agreeable to yourself."

"And I wish to do that which is most agreeable to you."



"Did—did—it ever strike you that I should prefer quiet and seclusion after—my—irreparable loss?" Her voice trembled as she alluded to Billie's death.

"No," he answered candidly, "not when we came here. You had seclusion for some time after the loss of the little one, and I guessed that gaiety and that kind of thin' would be better for you out here."

"You see you were wrong."

"I see I was. Oh, wife," he added, flinging himself down on his knees at her side, "don't you see I did it for you—did it because I thought it would help you to forget, lighten the burden of your sorrow?"

"It was very good of you," she said more gently, touched by the despairing look on his ugly face.

"Had I thought for one instant it was distasteful to you," he went on earnestly, "I would not have done it. You have only to tell me what you wish to do, and it shall be done."

"I wish nothing," she said with a wistful weariness in the blue eyes, and a quiver of the lovely lips.

"Nothing?"

"Nothing," she repeated.

"Would you rather leave here?"

"Not unless you care to do so."

"Tell me," he persisted, "would you prefer leaving Boston?"

"Yes, then, I would," she said desperately, feeling that anything would be better than facing the gentlemen who "operated in pork" and their wives again.

"Where shall we go?" he queried, stroking the slender fingers of which he had possessed himself.

"That is for you to decide."

"No, for you."

"I could make no decision in that way."

"You must. I wish you to," he ordered; but he forgot at what a disadvantage he stood, as men always do when the greater part of the affection is on their side, and his wife flatly refused his request.

"Shall we try Canada?" he suggested, after having vainly tried to induce her to name a place.

"Yes, by all means."

"There is no other place you would rather go to?"

"None."

"It will be extremely cold there now."

"I like the cold."

"It will be bracin', and Linton said you wanted that."

"Yes."

"We can start soon. To-morrow if you like," he said eagerly, looking at the pale, beautiful face—paler by contrast with the sable robe she wore.

"There is no particular hurry."

"Yes, there is every hurry, since you don't like this cabin. I won't stay here a moment longer than I can help. I can't bear to think anythin' annoys you."

"Why do you take so much trouble about me?" she exclaimed, touched by his evident desire to please her at any cost.

"Why, because I love you," he answered at once.

"I am not worth it," she said, sorrowfully.

"You are to me," he whispered passionately, gazing into the eyes, that never filled with a happy, glad-somelight at his approach. "Don't you know that you are all the world to me? Don't you realise that you are all earth holds that I prize?"

"No—I—hardly—think—Ido," she faltered, shrinking back, for the passion in his eyes frightened her.

"Then try to," he urged; "try to understand what you are to me—how infinitely dear and precious—and then perhaps the gulf that yawns between us may be bridged over, and our hearts brought nearer together."

"I—I—could—not."

"Try," he implored. "Think what I suffer now? I am your husband, and yet—I am no nearer to you than the stranger you

meet at a dance or dinner. I am shut out from your life and sympathy. I stand alone, gazin' at that Eden I fain would enter and yet cannot. Will you?" he murmured, as she remained silent with averted head.

"If you wish it," she answered at last, reluctantly.

"Wish it! I more than wish."

"I—I—do not—think—that—that—we shall ever—be like—most married people."

"Why not?"

"I—hardly—know. Yet something tells me we never shall."

"I won't give up hope if you will try."

"I promise you I will," she returned earnestly; "still don't hope too much. The disappointment may be all the greater."

"I am used to disappointments now," he rejoined, lightly. "And I don't want to despair over this. Seal our compact with a kiss?" he pleaded, passing his arm round her waist, longing for the touch of those soft lips, but she only presented her cheek, which chilled his ardour, and sent him from her side, saddened and downcast.

A few days later they started for Quebec.

Everything in Canada was so novel to Opal, and so interesting, that she brightened perceptibly, and took some interest in her surroundings.

The St. Lawrence was frozen, and over its broad bosom the Canadians flew on their skates, or skimmed along by the aid of the Danish skate-sail, which was simply rigged on their backs, controlled by a simple arrangement which enabled them to tack or reef at pleasure, and to make "time" in a way that would astonish English patineurs. Then the ice-yachts—skeleton boats mounted on enormous runners—were much patronised; and Opal enjoyed being in one, sped along by the wind at the rate of twenty miles an hour, and more; or in a sleigh, with its tinkling bells, swift-going team, and warm buffalo robes.

It was invigorating to rush through the fresh, crisp air, over the stainless snow, that flew to the right and left in sparkling showers, as the runners dashed it aside.

The sky, blue as in June, the sun shining brightly and steadily on the whitened roads and fields, and a curious absence of noise; the express carts, waggons, sulkies, buggies, and ox-teams, all moving silently, through the absence of wheels, and the soft carpeting that Nature so abundantly supplies in North America.

Spragg was thankful to see some of the old peach-like bloom steal back to the wan cheeks, and the wistful eyes lose a little of their melancholy, and encouraged her to be much out in the air, and adopt all the customs of the country, or as many as she could.

And she did as he wished, for her pity had been roused by his appeal for love and sympathy. She felt she had been living selfishly, wrapped up in her own troubles and sorrows, her own great loss that would be an ever-living grief and source of regret to her, giving never a thought to the man whom she had vowed to love, honour, and obey, to take for better for worse, in sickness or in health; and whose disappointment, she was now beginning to understand, was overwhelming and crushing, and who, for her sake, was ready to do anything, and sacrifice anything, and asked as reward only a kind look, a tender word.

Her lot was hard, but so was his, shut out from all domestic happiness and enjoyment; and as she stood by the great frozen St. Lawrence, watching the swift-flying mocassined feet of the half-breeds and Indians, as they skimmed along, she made new resolutions, and determined in the future that if she could not be as loving as she should be to the man who called her "wife," at least she would be more kind and considerate, try to carry out the vows she made as she knelt at his side, before God's altar, try to forget her own wretchedness in lightening his.

(To be continued.)

## A TRUE LOVER'S KNOT.

—10:—

My lady love, sweetest and best,  
A ribbon I'll buy for your breast,  
And tie in a true lover's knot.  
Shall it be like a rose in a bow?  
Or shall it be white as the snow?  
Pray what would you like, or like not?

Or, lady love, gentle and fair,  
Shall it be like the gold of your hair,  
Twined into a true lover's knot?  
Bright blue, like the blue of the skies?  
True blue, like the blue of your eyes?  
Or the tender forget-me-not?

If you were an Irish colleen  
I'd buy you a ribbon of green,  
The green of the shamrock, I wot;  
If you were a Scotch lassie I  
The tartan would gallantly tie—  
Tie into a true lover's knot.

Or, were you a Dutch maiden fair,  
Then orange alone you should wear;  
True orange so splendidly bright;  
But, darling, the colour for you  
Isn't tartan, or green or blue,  
Isn't rose, or orange in hue;  
It is white; it is bridal white.

Oh, will you wear white as my bride?  
She answered, with love and with pride:  
"Oh, fairest of all, the white bow!"  
Then soon rang the wedding bells clear,  
And friends from afar, and from near,  
Wore bride favours, white as the snow.  
L. E. B.

## A FLOWER OF FATE.

—O—

### CHAPTER XV.

As autumn slowly settled into winter the gay party that had been gathered together by the Earl of Vivian drifted apart in their various ways.

Sir Keith Moretown, back once again at his home, was occupied night and day in decorating, refurnishing, and arranging the baronial mansion for the mistress that was to come to it at Christmas-tide. He was as happy as mortal man could hope to be—his love fed by fleeting visions of his pretty fiancée when he went up to town, and by the numerous airy letters she found time to write him.

Lord Vivian went abroad at this time, and tried to induce Rex to go with him, but in vain.

It was Mr. Darnley's custom ordinarily to winter in Italy or some sunny climate, but this year he contented himself with remaining in his cosy bachelor chambers at the Albany, transacting business which he undertook from inclination, not necessity. He saw a good deal of Lord Dunmoor, and went frequently to see his aunt, the Countess, who, with Lady Anice, was settled in the Daly town mansion, intent on the wedding trousseau and paraphernalia.

Sir Keith's betrothed was in the height of bliss; day after day was spent with court milliners, tailors, modistes, and jewellers. She flitted from one to another, sighing prettily over her exertions, and only silent when concocting a new costume.

With Rex she was on apparently much better terms. She knew too well what his opinion was of her, also that he objected quietly to her marriage with Sir Keith, and she took delight in teasing and annoying her grav cousin, whom, in her heart, she had never forgiven for not falling a desperate victim to her charms.

Rex was little impressed by Lady Anice's mischievous endeavours to annoy him. His visits were to his aunt, not to her, and he proved a thorough friend to the Countess, who was harassed almost beyond endurance by the boundless extravagance of her daughter, and the thought of her invalid husband left in

the care of servants till the marriage was accomplished.

"What attraction is there to such a man as Keith Moretown? Can he not see beyond the surface, and read her hollowiness?" mused Rex, one evening, as he sat at dinner, and watched Lady Anice carrying on an animated flirtation with a young cavalry officer, who was a guest of the night. "If he were a worldly everyday being I should not trouble myself, but to him the awakening, when it comes, and come it will in terribly quick time, will be a blow almost beyond him."

His thoughts were scattered by a tiny shriek from Lady Anice.

"Rex do you hear that? Dunmoor—mamma; it is really too awful. Captain Regal, do you think it can be true?"

"I had it from Motte himself," was the young man's answer.

"What is this terrible news, Anice?" Rex asked, quietly.

"Why, Mr. Wentworth Motte is married—actually married to one of those low actresses that came to Bentley. You remember, when we were staying with dear Lord Vivian."

Rex winced against himself; he could not help it. Lady Anice's clear, cold insolence, as she spoke of "those low actresses," pierced through the armour of his usual self-control and indifference to his heart. Vera—his sweet, pure love, to be classed under such a name! His blood mounted to his brow, greatly to Lady Anice's delight.

"Ah! ah! Mr. Rex, at last I have found out a spot on which I can wreak some of my dislike. The game shall not be altogether in your hands," ran her quick thought.

"If it was that lovely young girl we saw on the common," broke in Lord Dunmoor, quickly, "by Jove! I think Motte is to be envied."

Lady Anice scowled at her brother.

"I thought her a most ordinary person," she observed, coldly. "Now, can one say whether those class of women are beautiful or not? One never sees their real faces, you know."

"That is a fault to be found with others; not only those class of women."

Rex Darnley spoke curtly, and Captain Regal, scenting there was something beneath this, said hurriedly,—

"Mrs. Wentworth Motte is a very handsome woman. She used to play as a Miss Delane, I believe. They seem ridiculously happy."

"They will be well suited, no doubt," Lady Anice remarked, with a sneer. "After all, an actress is on a par with a soap-boiler."

She chose to forget at that moment how industriously she had angled for the soap-boiler and his gigantic fortune.

Captain Regal felt that he had introduced an element of discord. He got nervous, and floundered only further.

"They are staying at the Bristol. It seems, Motte says, they are in great trouble about a girl friend of his wife's, someone who was in the company with her, and is most curiously lost. They are employing the outest detectives, but without success."

"This sounds romantic," observed Lord Dunmoor.

Rex made no observation—his hands were gripped together. This lost girl could mean only one, and that one—Vera. The thought was horrible! He had pictured her working wearily in grimy towns, slaving in a life she detested, but he had comforted himself with the thought that fate might hold some other existence for her.

Sir Keith, acting under his instructions, had put the matter of investigating Vera's birth into the hands of a well-known firm of lawyers. At Rex's advice, also, the strictest secrecy was maintained, for, as he remarked, wisely,—

"Remember we have to deal with a fox in De Mortimer. We must work in the dark; once let him get scent of us, and we shall lose him for ever. Vera is a gold-mine to him, and he will not renounce her—child or no child of his."

And now, while he was dreaming of the happiness he prayed Heaven he should be instrumental in giving her, the news came that she was lost. He sat in a fever of impatience till the Countess and her daughter had withdrawn, then pulling his chair up to Captain Regal's he asked him, quietly, while the others were chatting, for more particulars.

The young officer could tell him nothing more, so he determined to go without delay to the Bristol, and ask all news of Maggie and her husband.

He ran up to take farewell of his aunt, and found Lady Anice alone.

She was humming to herself while she opened some letters. A card of invitation lay on the table; the printing was so large Rex could not fail to see it.

He stopped in the middle of his message to her mother, and said to his cousin, quietly,—

"Anice, how is it such a card comes to this house?"

Lady Anice glanced carelessly at it.

"Oh! La Comtesse de Canyani! She is a most delightful woman, with such a pretty daughter."

"Where did you meet her?"

"Somewhere—a dance—a dinner. I forget. She is quite in our set," and Lady Anice continued her humming.

"She is a woman you must not know," Rex said suddenly.

"Pray why?" she asked, looking up in surprise.

"She is an enemy of Keith Moretown's."

"Indeed! Really you astonish me, Rex. You are so melodramatic. An enemy! I assure you she is nothing of the sort. She admires him exceedingly; besides, I am not supposed to embrace all Keith's likes and dislikes when I am his wife."

"Put the matter to him," Rex answered, coldly. "In this case I know what his answer will be, Anice."

"It sounds most extraordinary. How fortunate I am not of a jealous disposition!"

Rex went from the room thoroughly angry with his dainty cousin, and feeling an instinctive sensation of trouble arising for Keith Moretown. But as he left the house this vanished, and Vera came to his thoughts again.

"What has come to me?" he mused, almost impatiently. "I, who swore even to myself that I would never love, to be tormented, worried, made miserable at the very remembrance of this girl. Can my heart whisper wrong? Can it be folly to worship her as I do? No, no, a thousand times no! Love is the purifier, the blessing, of my cold, selfish existence. Lost! Gone with her father or alone! I burn to know."

Mr. and Mrs. Wentworth Motte were at home, and Rex was welcomed enthusiastically.

Maggie looked pretty, but her eyes were sad; by very skilful means Rex got the whole story from her, sitting very quietly till she finished.

"How long ago is this?" he asked, in a voice that sounded constrained.

"Nearly five weeks," Maggie answered, with a sigh, "and not a trace of her anywhere. Sometimes I fancy," she dropped her voice to a whisper, "I fancy whether poor Vera is dead. She was so strange."

"Don't say that," Rex interrupted hurriedly. "She can't be dead."

Maggie wiped away two tears with her lace pocket-handkerchief, and glanced quietly, yet sharply, at him.

"Nathaniel was like a madman when he found her gone. The tour came to a sudden end, and I believe he was drunk for a whole week; but we have seen or heard nothing of him since. Wenty and I have been everywhere. Now we have put the case into the hands of three detectives. We must find her, if she is to be found."

"Yes. We must find her," Rex repeated quietly.

He sat chatting with them for half an hour;

then, promising to see them the next day, went to his rooms to think and plan.

"Wenty?" asked pretty Mrs. Motte, when alone with her husband. "Do you know that I am blind, and have been for a long time?"

"Blind! my darling!" there was genuine dismay in Mr. Wentworth Motte. "No, by Jove! Don't tell—"

Maggie laughed softly, kissed his concerned face, and then said, as she nestled close to him,—

"You silly, dear old goose! I don't mean really blind. I mean stupid. Can't you see that Mr. Darnley is madly in love with poor Vera?"

"No, by Jove!" was the surprised exclamation, "no! You must be wrong, Maggie; Darnley has never been in love with anyone."

"Well, that is no reason why he should not be now. Trust my woman's eyes and wit this time. I am sure I am right."

Rex called at the Bristol the next morning, but Mr. and Mrs. Motte were out, and, leaving a message to say he would call again later, he walked away. He was just turning into Piccadilly deep in thought, scarcely able to define his feelings or to fathom the depth of his misery that came at the thought of Vera, when he ran against a friend.

"The very man I want to see. Are you doing anything? Can you come with me?" said this man.

Rex agreed; and they strolled along, discussing the business on hand till they reached the other's destination.

"Come up with me," said the man. "I won't keep you long."

"I will wait for you here."

Rex sat down on a form, and then glancing at the names printed on the stone wall found one he knew—that of Mason.

He got up at once, and made his way to the door designated by the painted hand.

He found Mr. Mason alone, but very busy—he looked annoyed at something, Rex thought.

He spoke almost directly.

"I am not in a good humour," he said, with half a smile. "And to tell you the truth, Darnley, I was just going to write to you. I am afraid I can't keep Watson; he is a nice gentlemanly young fellow, full of good intentions, but too utterly weak to carry them out. I have had to pull him up sharply more than once. I fancy the boy is in a bad set. Look at the time, nearly twelve o'clock, and he has not appeared at his post yet."

"I am really sorry," Rex replied truthfully. He was scarcely surprised at the news, for he knew only too well how unstable Tom had always been, but he liked the young man, and when the thought came that Vera had more than liked him, he felt grieved.

"All these letters should have been answered last night," went on Mr. Mason, growing more fretful.

"Where is Watson to be found?" asked Rex suddenly. "Perhaps he's ill. I will go and look him up. I have nothing to do and I take an interest in him. After all, he is young."

"Thanks, Darnley. If you would do this I should be obliged. I am willing to give him another trial. Are you quite sure it is not taking you from some appointment?"

"Quite sure," Rex answered.

"There is his address, and I expect you will find him very courteous. This is not his first offence. I have looked over his unpunctuality many and many a time."

"Come and dine with me to-night, and we will talk the matter over," Rex said, as he took his leave.

He ran upstairs, left a message for his friend, saying he could not wait, then made his way to the street, hailed a hansom, gave the directions, and was bowled away.

For her sake, I must look after him," he thought to himself. "He cannot be all



bad or she would not have loved him. Oh! Vera! my pearl! my angel of light! Where are you now? What if Mr. Motte should be right, and she has gone to her death? She was not like other women; she shrank from her life of drudging shame and wretchedness. Why should she not seek—But no, I will not think of it! I must not, or I shall go mad."

The hansom pulled up at a small paper shop in a dingy street.

"This is the number, sir," said the cabman.

Rex got out and went into the shop.

In answer to his inquiry for Mr. Watson, a gray, good-natured woman came forward.

"Are you a friend, sir, may I ask?" she replied to his question.

Rex looked surprised.

"Yes, I am a friend—a good one, I hope."

"Then, sir, if you please to go to No. 7, Clunworth-terrace, it's just round the corner. You can't mistake it—No. 7."

"Then Mr. Watson does not live here?"

Rex could not help his surprise.

"No, sir. He lives at No. 7."

"That is curious," Rex mused, as he thanked the woman; bade his cab wait there, and walked to the street directed. I don't like it. Alas! poor Watson! I fear he has determined to go to the bad, no matter what one does for him."

He stopped before No. 7. The small bay-windows were ornamented with white muslin blinds, and contrasted marvellously with their neighbours.

He knocked sharply; and, as the door was opened, asked briefly if Mr. Watson were at home.

The woman shook her head.

"Do you want him particular, sir?" she asked, seeing Rex's face fall.

"Yes, I do, very particularly. Can you tell me when he is likely to be home? What time this evening?"

The woman shook her head.

"Can't say. But if you will step in I will inquire."

Rex walked into the tiny sitting-room.

"Who shall I say, sir? Mrs. Watson is upstairs."

Mrs. Watson! Rex started at first, then his surprise vanished. It was Tom's mother, of course.

"Mrs. Watson would not know my name. Will you say an old friend of Mr. Watson's?"

Rex stood undecided how to begin the subject to the mother; he felt it would be awkward and painful, yet speak he must.

His back was turned to the door, but as the handle rattled he moved round; then, with a muttered exclamation, staggered back, for there, standing in the doorway, pale, lovely, unutterably sad, was the figure of the girl he was looking for—his only love—Vera!

## CHAPTER XVI.

THERE was a sudden movement from Vera; the colour mounted to her face, then she drew back with a shrinking gesture expressive of dismay, surprise, and it seemed pain.

Rex spoke first.

"I am afraid I have alarmed you, Miss De Mortimer. Pray believe that—"

Vera closed the door, moved forward, and as she placed one small trembling hand on a chair she said, in a faint, undecided voice,—

"You wished to see my husband?"

Rex started for one instant, the hot blood coursed through his veins and showed in his face; the next it seemed as if he were plunged in a sea of ice, so great was the shock and the misery of that moment.

"Then you are married to Tom Watson?" he said, speaking with difficulty.

"Yes; I am his wife."

There was a short pause.

Rex's face had grown pale; it looked very stern; his mouth was contracted.

Vera stood quietly gazing at him, a passion of mad regret and love surging in her heart at

this sudden meeting with him; it grew and grew till it was more than she could bear. She broke out, hurriedly,—

"If there is anything, any message—"

Rex turned; he did not seem to have heard her words.

"Do you know that you are being searched for everywhere?" he asked, in a voice that was forced and harsh through the concentration of his emotion; to her it sounded terribly stern.

"You mean by Maggie?" she faltered.

"By Mrs. Motte and her husband. It is cruel to have kept them in such suspense. They have suffered, indeed."

"As I have done," she whispered.

She moved away suddenly, sat down by the table, and buried her face in her hands.

Rex stood gazing at the masses of red-gold hair, every thread of which he seemed to know, at the slender, graceful form, the tiny, fair hands. He longed to throw himself beside her, draw her into his arms, and clasp her to his arms, but he dared not. She was taken from him for ever; a barrier as strong as iron stood between them, a barrier which only the rust of sin and shame could erode, and neither of such could be even thought of in connection with her.

A great sympathy welled up in his heart for her; he felt that her young life—a life so gloriously bedecked by nature—had held nothing but sorrow. Her childhood—if she were proved to be Keith Mortimer's lost sister, or the veritable offspring of De Mortimer—had held no young delights or happiness, and now what stretched before her? He shuddered as he thought of this—seeing one long regret and wretchedness follow on her hasty marriage, her love turn to dust and ashes, her dream become a realization of weary trouble, perhaps disgrace.

His compassion moved him to utter aloud some sympathy. He put his hand tenderly on her bent head.

"Poor child," he said, gently, "poor child!"

A shiver ran through Vera.

She lifted her face; two bright spots of colour were fastened on each cheek.

"Why do you pity me?" she asked.

She longed for him to be gone now that the first acute moment of surprise was passed. The misery and pain she endured at seeing him loaded her heart, and made her every nerve thrill with the effort of constraint she put upon herself.

Rex guessed something of this; he moved his hand and took up his hat once more.

"My presence distresses you, I see," he observed, gently, "therefore I will go, but before I do let me try and convince you that I am a true friend, both of your husband's and yourself. Will you not trust me, and let me offer you my friendship, now or whenever you may need it?"

Vera closed her eyes. Now she longed to seize his outstretched hand, and press it to her lips ere she answered him, hurriedly,—

"Indeed I am convinced, Mr. Darnley. Have you not proved yourself my—my husband's true friend before to-day? But—it must end there; further friendship between ourselves and you must be—is impossible!"

"Why?" asked Rex, quietly.

Vera drew a sharp breath.

He asked why! If he but knew the truth, knew that it was because a perfect passion of love for him lived in her heart she said they must never meet!

"Our paths lie far apart," she replied, faintly.

He was silent; then as she rose to her feet he said,—

"May I let Mrs. Motte know I have found you?"

"No—no!" she cried, suddenly. "Maggie would come to me—and I could not bear that."

"Then she is to remain in suspense; her husband and herself are to go on searching—searching till one of the detectives they have

employed more clever than the others will discover you."

Vera stood with her hands clasped.

"I did not think of that," she said, slowly. She paused, and then went on. "Tell Maggie, then, that you know I am safe and well, but ask her not to come to me."

Rex looked at the averted face. Was it his fancy, or did he catch the glint of a tear drop down the pale, lovely face? He threw prudence to the winds.

"Vera," he murmured, passionately, "my darling! what is it?"

She half-turned at his words, then slowly put up one hand, as if to ward off more.

"You must not speak like that. It is too late—now."

"Too late!"—he moved nearer. "Heaven! what horrible words, and to think, to know, they are true—that a short few weeks ago I could have said them to you, and you—might have listened. What blight was on us? Ah! Vera, if only I believed then as I believe now on my soul—that you love me!"

The thrilling eagerness, and intensity of his tones penetrated to her very core—like oil on burning flames so did they fire her passion into words.

"Yes," she cried, brokenly, "believe, it for it is true. I—do love you—with all my heart and soul!"

Rex's hands were outstretched, his face pale, but no longer grave, gazed down at her, a light as of heaven in his eyes. In that moment Vera saw her danger; she sank into a chair, and buried her face in her hands.

"What have I said?" she murmured.

"What have I said?"

At the sound of shame in her voice Rex woke. He was on the brink of paradise, but he forced himself back. Above all things she must be considered—her honour, her purity must never have the breath of scandal or disgrace to tarnish it.

He sighed a deep sigh, walked away, and gazed, in a dull, blank manner, out of the window at the houses opposite. There was a long silence between them, and then he spoke.

"Tell me all, dear," he said, in grave, tender tones. "My heart must be satisfied."

Vera put her elbow on the table, and leaned her head on her hand.

"It is not a long story," she answered, almost mechanically, "but it contains the history of a mistake. Maggie has told you about my leaving her. I will not go over that again; it is sufficient to know that I determined to separate myself from my father once and for ever. I left the house. I can feel now the cold wind whistling round me. I had some money in my purse, and with that money I made up my mind I would travel to London. What my plans were at that moment Heaven knows! I was sick with misery and shame; my pride alone sustained me. I reached the station."

She sat back in her chair, and passed one hand over her eyes. Rex never moved from his gaze through the window.

"The train to London started in an hour. All through those long sixty minutes I sat crouched by a dying fire, trembling at every footstep, lest it should be someone who would know me, and so tell my father."

"At last the engine steamed into the station. I crept into an empty carriage, and was whirled away in the darkness. What my thoughts were during that journey I cannot even remember, but as we reached London—cramped with long sitting, cold, hungry, weak—I could scarcely stagger. I had wrapped a large cloak around me, and a thick veil was drawn over my face, so I thought myself secure from recognition."

"After I had given up my ticket I stood thinking what I should do next, and feeling suddenly how utterly friendless and stranded I was when a voice behind me spoke my name, and, turning in fright, I saw Tom Watson."

Rex left the window, and walked to the



["POOR CHILD," HE SAID, GENTLY, "POOR CHILD"]

small fireplace, putting one foot on the fender as Vera went on, quickly,—

"He seemed to guess at once what had happened. He besought me to accept his help; he told me that he had just come from Bentley, was going to interview his new master the next day, and had then intended travelling straight down to the company to satisfy himself that my father had not ill-treated me.

"I hesitated at first; then, as I felt the faintness stealing over me again, I consented to accept his help, and let him take me to a respectable lodging-house he knew, kept by an old servant of his mother's."

She stopped, and Rex never turned as he said, in a curt, almost cold manner,—

"Well, what followed?"

"Mistake after mistake!" Vera cried, rising, and pacing to and fro in her agitation. "I should never have listened to him, but in my loneliness his friendship was as an oasis in a desert.

"He besought me, as he had done once before, to become his wife. He promised me protection from my father, a life of comfort, freedom from the stage, or any thought of it. He spoke of his mother and sister, two women who had given me love and kindness, and, working on my weakness, I consented to become his wife."

She gave a short, quick sigh.

"No sooner had I yielded than I repented, but he would not see my reluctance. The marriage was hastened on, strict secrecy was maintained to prevent my father from discovering me, and a short fortnight ago I married him—a man I cannot even respect."

"But you loved him once, surely?" Rex turned now. "Or was I blinded by fancy?" Vera's face grew a shade warmer; then faded again.

"You were blinded by your imagination. I never loved him or any one else but—"

She did not finish the sentence. Then she moved nearer to Rex.

"I feel it is cowardice—sin to speak like this; but, oh! if you knew the burden in my heart! Only to-day I learnt, when I urged that our marriage should be made public, that his mother and Amy should know, that I had practically ruined him; that Mr. Mason, his employer, had particularly desired an unmarried man, and that we must act a lie—a deceit—still longer. This, coming on the face of my earnest entreaties to him to release me, has unnerved me; but I shall grow patient by-and-by. After all, I am his wife, and as such I must remember my duty."

The voice broke as she finished, and she let her head fall on her arm upon the table.

Rex stooped for the hand hanging by her side and lifted it to his lips.

"My poor love, my lost love!" was the whisper in his heart; out loud he said, gently,—

"Vera, you must turn to me—use me as your friend. Heaven knows there is nothing on earth I would not do for you that was in my power. You have always been the purest, sweetest woman in the world to me since the first time I saw you. Promise me that you will give me the happiness of knowing that you trust in me—believe in me?"

"Trust in you—believe in you!" she whispered. "Ah! indeed I do; but I cannot accept your friendship. It is a delight—a gleam of sunshine in my darkness—to know you like me."

"Like you," he repeated, hurriedly; "no, Vera, not like you—worship—love—adore you!"

"Then, as you so honour me, I must be worthy of your honour, Rex. I may call you Rex this once. Remember, I am no angel; I am human—a girl in years, a woman in troubles; still I am human. I could not see you often—I could not." Her voice sank to a whisper, then she went on quickly, "Ah! if that bygone day in Beaconsfield library—If I had but known!"

Rex kissed her hand softly again.

"And yet I loved you more for that doubt, Vera," he said, with half a smile. "I knew then that your sweet, pure self existed, indeed, and in truth. Dear, we must be brave. It is hard. Not till this moment did I know how hard it could be to be separated from you for ever, yet we must bear it. And listen, my darling, though I cannot see you, still always remember I am your constant, your never altering friend. I will come to you, Vera, whenever you call for me, if it be from the uttermost parts of the earth. Put your hand in mine, dear, to show your trust."

Tears stood in Vera's great, starlike eyes, but she slipped her fingers into his, and the memory of that firm hand-clasp remained to comfort her many a time afterwards. She rose as Rex took up his hat at the door. He looked back.

"One word more. Let Mrs. Motte come to you. She is fretting terribly about you, Vera. What have you to fear from her—she is staunch and true?"

"Nothing, it was foolishness—a fancy that came over me—it is gone now. Yes, I shall be glad to see Maggie, to hear of her happiness."

Rex turned the handle.

"When your—when Watson comes home ask him to run down and see me; he knows my rooms, the old address. I want to have a chat with him particularly."

He looked back to take one last gaze at the fair, sad face, made as if he would step forward, checked himself, and the next moment Vera heard the outer door bang, hasty footsteps fade away in the distance, and her misery returned in tenfold force.

"Oh! Rex, my love! my heart's love, come back to me!" she moaned. "It was hard before, but it is worse now. How shall I live without you, Rex?"

But the whisper fell on the empty air; henceforth she must exist for duty, for honour, but not for love. That was gone, and she could not—she must not recall it.

(To be continued.)





["GIVE HER A SIP OF THIS, MA'AM. SHE WAS AS NEAR AS A TOUCHER BEING RUN OVER."]

NOVELETTE

## THE SHADOW OF A CRIME.

### CHAPTER I.

HILLSIDE.

"AND so I am to understand this is your final determination, Edith; our engagement is at an end?"

The speaker was a young man of about twenty-four, tall and well-built, whilst his companion, over whose life eighteen summers had scarcely past, was in her fair beauty a pleasing contrast to the dark complexion and coal-black hair which he possessed, forming together a pretty picture as they stood in the soft light of a summer's sunset, with the warm green of surrounding foliage in its varied hues serving as a background for the same.

"It will be better for both, Jack," the girl replied, whilst nervously pulling a leaf to pieces. She kept her eyes diligently on the ground, so as to avoid their coming in contact with those of her lover.

"And how long have you thought of this?" he said, a slight tone of sarcasm in his voice.

"Well, since," she stammered, "since—"

"Yes, since that London fellow came among us, with his soft tongue and winsome ways," and John Hartman withdrew his arm angrily from her waist, noting even in the growing gloom the deep colour which now mantled her soft cheek.

"Well, have it so, if you will," she replied; "but had Sydney Bonfour never come amongst us, as you say, my resolve would have been the same. You know how I hate poverty, and have I not had enough of it, and seen the misery it brings on others, without running headlong into the same thing myself?" and she impatiently kicked a stone from her path.

The next few moments they were silent,

each intently studying the ground at their feet, until Edith, feeling the silence becoming oppressive, made a movement as though to depart.

"I don't see any good gained by staying here," she said, "so, Jack, good-night!" and she held out a tiny, pink hand to her companion.

"Good-night," he replied, "if you will have it so, Edith; but let me walk with you as far as your home; don't refuse me that," and he looked with sad eyes so pleadingly into hers that she became softened beneath his gaze.

"Don't look so," she said. "I don't mean to be unkind; we have known each other all our lives, and if I live to be ever so old I shall never forget you."

He turned for one moment, drawing her towards him, then with a deep, drawn sigh, as he looked down on her upturned face, he felt it could scarce be true that he was to lose her for ever, that those two whose lives had been so closely entwined should now drift asunder, he knew not whither.

"I little thought it would ever have come to this, Edith," he added. "You fear poverty, you say; you should never have known what it meant after you had become my wife. Oh! how I would have worked for you, that you should never have had reason to repent the day you confided in my love; but it is all over now," and he passed his hand sorrowfully over her golden tresses, the last time that he should ever have her near him.

He knew he was only aggravating the misery which the thought of losing her, caused him, but he clung to those last moments so tenaciously, feeling even angry with the twilight shadows as they gathered around them, and shut out the sight of that face he loved so well.

Yes, it was true. Edith Pegram had never known anything but trouble and worry since her father's death, some five years since, when her mother was left with her three children,

of whom she was the eldest, almost penniless; the little farm which they had then occupied being taken from them, leaving them nothing but a few pounds derived from an insurance society on which to subsist.

With this Mrs. Pegram commenced a small day-school, to which most of the neighbours, who had known her in better days, sent their children, and in the management of which, when she became old enough, Edith had to assist. But as the girl budded into the woman she began to weary of the monotony of the life at Hillside, which, with the duties of the school, the care and trouble of her two little brothers, added to that of the household matters, became but a continued routine of worry and anxiety from which she had no relief until Jack Hartman, the son of a neighbouring farmer, took compassion on the sad, wearied look, ever casting a shadow on the beautiful face of the child-woman—a compassion which was but the dawn of a strong love, beginning even to Edith to dispel the gloom of her uneventful life, and a something, when, at the end of a maybe more than usual hard day, he would lead her away down the mossy lanes to where the river glided on peacefully beneath the evening sky, to look forward to when that day's task was completed.

But, then, Jack's father was but a small farmer, and they had to work hard for their daily bread; and when times were bad, which they had been of late years, it was as much as they could do to make two ends meet. And Edith would often wonder why—when she saw the carriages of the wealthy residents around Hillside pass their door—why the goods of this world should be so unequally divided; and she would view her own sweet face and pretty figure in the glass, and think she could hold her own with any one of them was she as becomingly attired. And although she would instil into the minds of her pupils to be content with the lot in which Heaven had placed them it was a maxim she could never carry out in her own case.

She was fond of Jack, fond of her mother and brothers, but their united love could not satiate the desire she felt to soar into the world of which she read and thought so much.

Hillside was but a short twenty miles from London—London, to see which was the height of her ambition, the goal of her hopes, the delight of her thoughts!

Her mother was a Londoner, and she would tell her of its grand streets, large squares, and stupendous buildings; but when she would ask her to give up the school, and go there to live, she would only shake her head.

"If they were hard-up at Hillside, there they would starve," so there was nothing left to Edith but to go on in the same old track, and dream in the future.

It was then that a stranger came amongst them, Sydney Bonfleur, who was the guest of Sir Anthony Mervin, whose residence, Myrtle Lodge, as it was called, was but a stone's throw from Mrs. Pogram's unpretentious abode; and but a few weeks had passed when it became whispered in the neighbourhood that the former was always to be seen hanging about the widow's cottage, and on more than one occasion had been seen in conversation with Edith herself.

When it came to the ears of John Hartman at first he would pay no heed to what he considered was but the chatter of envious tongues, for was not Edith the most beautiful girl for miles round?

But as her manner became colder and colder, he one day told her of what the neighbours were talking, with a dreadful fear at his heart that it was all over between them, though even then he would willingly renounce all claim he had upon her affections as he but sure that her gentleman lover would prove as true as he would have been.

At first she would confess to nothing, indignantly questioning his or anyone else's right to interfere with her affairs. If he were not satisfied he was quite at liberty to break their engagement. As for her part, she would rather it was so; and she would have left him there and then had not a something in his sad face withheld her. But to return.

"Be you will never forget me, and that is all," he said, in reply to her last remark.

"What else can I do?" she asked, for the moment feeling grieved for the pain she was causing her companion. "You can't help being poor, no more than I can. Were things different, you know—"

A slight stir in the bushes behind them caused both to start, and Jack could see even in the darkening gloom that she turned white as the rest of the sentence died on her lips.

"What was it?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing—a hare or rabbit, perhaps. But if you are coming we had better go home at once—see how late it is getting! Mother will be anxious," and she linked her arm within his own.

"There's been a gentleman here for you, Edy," said her little brother, who was at the gate awaiting her return.

But Edith took no notice of the child's communication further than to tell him to run in and go to bed, for it was getting very late; when turning to John Hartman,—

"Won't you come in and see mother?" she asked.

He had let her arm slip from within his own as the boy's words fell on his ear.

"No," he said, "why should I?" whilst he turned impatiently away from her, and was about to move away when the soft pressure of her hand upon his arm caused him to look round.

"See, the dew is falling fast!" he said. "You had better not stay out any later, Edith."

"I know," she answered; "but I don't see, Jack, why we shouldn't part friends. You'll find plenty of girls better than I am, dear, and when I am gone I think you would be sorry if you had left me in anger."

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed, her tone had so changed; and even in the dim

light he could see tears in the eyes she raised to his, whilst she clung almost lovingly to his side. "Oh! Edith, my darling, you are not going away! Tell me, dear, you are not," and all the old love again welled to his throat.

But as she marked the effect her words had on him she appeared to recover her self-possession.

"Who said I was going away?" she asked. "I didn't, but one never knows what might happen to either of us, and I couldn't bear that we should not be friends—it would seem so terrible," and a shudder passed over her frame.

"Friends!" he repeated. "Heaven grant you may never be in need of such; but should evil come upon you, dear, in the years that are to come, whilst Jack Hartman is above ground you shall never want for one."

"Mother says you are to come in, Edith," cried a childish voice from the cottage door, and replying it was all right the latter again turned to her lover, from whom she seemed unwilling to part; whilst he, with his sad eyes resting in wonderment on her face, was puzzled to understand the sudden change in her manner towards him.

"Good-bye, Jack; I must go now, dear," she said; "but promise me not to think too badly of me, and be good to mother and the little ones." Then withdrawing her hand from his arm on which it had rested, without waiting for his reply she left him, with a sad dread at his heart.

## CHAPTER II.

### A DANGEROUS COURTSHIP.

MRS. POGRAM was awaiting her daughter's return when the latter re-entered the cottage, but she was too engrossed in her own troubles to notice the half-frightened, sorrowful look which pervaded the girl's countenance.

"It is too bad, Edith," she said, "to keep out so long, leaving me everything to do, and the children ought to have been in bed at least an hour ago."

"I don't see what there was to prevent them going, mother," the former retorted. "Surely they don't expect me to be their servant for ever."

"There you are," replied the other, "I can't speak but what you put yourself into a temper, I shall be right glad when you are married."

"Yes, mother," said Edith, and she bade her little brothers follow her from the room, when Mrs. Pogram was no sooner alone than she regretted the words she had uttered; but the day's duties had been so wearisome, the pupils so tiresome, besides sundry annoyances, as not being enabled to settle small weekly accounts, had made her feel irritable, and she had grown so to lean on the former for assistance that she felt lost when left to her own resources.

Meanwhile the boys were comfortably ensconced in their tiny white beds, wondering why it was that sister Edith hung so long over each, as she imprinted the usual evening kiss on their rosy lips.

"Are you cryin' cos mother is cross?" asked Paul, the younger, as he entwined his arms round her neck, and the tears started to his own eyes in sympathy with hers.

"No, darling, no," cried the girl, releasing herself from the child's embrace; "go to sleep, there's a dear, and you will be a good boy to mother to-morrow, won't you?"

"Yes, and so will Bill," said the little one, at the same time answering for his brother; and then Edith descended to where Mrs. Pogram was still poring over some figures, and arranging books for the next day.

All signs of her impatience had passed, whilst the former lingered longer than was customary in aiding her in her labours; but as the clock struck ten she arose, saying she was tired and would go to bed, adding,—

"You won't be long, Edith, will you?"

"No, mother," was the reply; but as the door closed her head dropped on her arms as they rested on the table, and sob after sob shook her frame.

"Will you ever forgive me, mother?" she cried; "but my life has been so hard—so hard." Then with a strong effort overcoming her emotion she drew a sheet of paper towards her, and began to write; but big tears fell, blotting the words as she traced them before her, until, having completed her task, she folded it and placed it on the chimney-piece, when advancing to the window she looked on the scene without.

The soft summer air gently entered, cooling her heated temples, as she leaned against the open sash, whilst the bright moon rendered every object visible as in the broad noontide.

She could see the village church in the distance, with its belt of dark foliage, and then the broad meadow, with the silvery river winding in the midst—all so still, so quiet; and then appeared at once, when a subdued tread fell on her ears, and the form of a man appeared stealthily to approach the gate leading to the cottage.

A few moments later, and she had noiselessly opened and closed the door behind her, whilst she advanced to where the figure still remained.

"And so my darling is true to her trust," said the latter, as he opened his arm to encircle the form of the trembling girl; "have you everything ready, Edith? I have arranged so that we can get the last train from—London."

"Yes, Sydney, was the reply; "but I feel so afraid; it is so wicked, is it not?" and the tears again rushed to the eyes she uplifted to his.

"Wicked! No, child," and Sydney Bonfleur clasped her nearer to him. "Don't you love me, Edith my darling? And before another sun has set you shall be my own little wife. Can't you trust me?"

But the girl only clung closer to him in reply. She could not trust herself to speak; she only saw his handsome face, with its dangerous hazel eyes, bent lovingly to her own, and she felt life without him would be valueless, as she nestled her fair head on his shoulder, and cast all fear from her heart.

One look at the little cottage resting amid the trees, to which she was about to bid farewell, one pang of remorse mingled with love, as she thought of the dear ones calmly sleeping within, and then drawing her wrap around her she turned her footsteps, whither her lover led her, to where a horse and trap awaited them in an adjoining lane.

"And you will never deceive me, Sydney?" she asked, again lifting her eyes to him.

"Never, dearest; so help me Heaven!" was the reply.

"But your friends up there, what will they think?" and she pointed to where Myrtle Lodge lay bathed in the moonlight.

"Nothing," he answered. "Sir Anthony bade me good-bye hours since, thinking by this time I am back in London."

But his reply was lost upon Edith, who, trembling with an undefined fear, clung closer to his side, as the shadow of a man crossed their path, and John Hartman passed where they stood.

He gave one look at the girl, then stopped, whilst his eyes resting on her companion, they shone with a dangerous gleam as he confronted them.

"Out of my path, fellow!" said Sydney, "or I shall be forced to remove you."

"Only by force will you do so," was the reply, "until I know what are your intentions towards this foolish girl," and he advanced towards Edith, who with fear and trembling clung closer to her lover's side.

"What is that to you, insolent scoundrel?" said the latter. "Out of my way, I say, before I treat you as you deserve!"

But his threats fell unheeded on the other's ears, as he besought Edith to give an explanation of being from home at such an hour,



whilst she beseeched him for her sake to leave them.

"Is this some rustic rival?" Sydney asked, turning to the girl. "The same I saw you with a few hours since, I suppose?"

"Yes, and one who loves her with such love as you could never know," John Hartman interposed; "for it is true and honest, whilst you will make her but the plaything of an hour, Sydney Bonfours!"

Then appealing to Edith,—

"Be warned, dear one," he said, "before it is too late. If you contemplate flight with this man, think again before you take a step you can never retrace. Remember the mother who reared you, and would rather see you in your coffin than what he will make you! Think of the little brothers who will be taught to look upon you as dead, or abhor your name as living!"

He had advanced so near that his warm breath passed over the girl's face, whilst Sydney, for the moment, remained a quiet spectator of the scene, but as Jack raised his hand to rest it on the arm of the former he drew her from him.

"We have had enough of this," he said. "It is for you, Edith, to choose between us, between the love of one who can and will raise you to the position of a lady, who will make your life one long day of blissful enjoyment, who will surround you with all the comforts money can purchase, and all the happiness which a fond heart can bestow. You have heard what his false tongue has insinuated, that you would be but the plaything of the moment? Believe him if you will, and share with him the days of toil, the nights of anxiety and worry which poverty entails, and knowing that in so doing you are happy I am content."

He waited a moment to watch the effects of his words, whilst John Hartman, no less anxious, became calm as he listened for the reply, on which the happiness of his future depended.

But they had not long to wait, for as Sydney made a feint as though to leave her, Edith retreated from the man who would have saved her, clinging convulsively to the side of the other.

Nor was the triumphant look which passed over Sydney's face lost on Jack.

"Heaven grant you have chosen well, Edith," he said. "And, so this is how we part! Shake hands, lass," and he held out his hand. "It is a hard blow, but I shall get over it, and if ever hard times come to you, and you want a friend, Edie, remember one who will never fail you. And you, sir," he added, turning to Sydney, "if I have wronged you I ask your pardon. Make her your wife, be good to her, as you say you will, and Jack Hartman's blessing will follow you to your life's end."

The hand he held was raised but for a second to his lips, and when she withdrew it from his grasp Edith knew it was moistened with his tears.

She dare not trust herself to speak, but, as though riveted to the spot, she remained motionless by Sydney's side, whilst together they watched his receding figure, until it became lost in the shadows of night.

And Jack, his heart tossed and hopes shattered, to which even at the last he had clung, wearily bent his steps homewards, even in his despair trusting that something might yet intervene to prevent a marriage which he felt convinced must end but in misery, little dreaming that, when he laid his head on his pillow, that Edith had crossed the gulf from which there was no return, until even in his sleep he became restless, and he awoke with a dread foreboding that she was lost to him for ever.

### CHAPTER III.

#### NEGLECTED.

"Are you going out again to-night, Sydney?" and Edith laid down the book she

had been reading as the former, on entering the room, told her of his intention to dine from home.

"Certainly," was the reply. "And why not?"

"Why not?" she repeated, "I wonder you should ask such a question. For the last month you have never spent an evening with me," and the tears started to her eyes, whilst she turned her head that he might not witness her emotion.

Scarcely eighteen months had passed since that night on which Edith had fled from Hillside, and yet she had already learnt that Sydney began to weary of her society, but it was only within the last few weeks that a dread she could not comprehend had taken possession of her. She was his wife, bore his name, was the mother of his child. Then why should he refuse to place her in that position which she had a right to expect? Why was it that he accepted invitations in which she was never included, where he had the companionship of other women, whilst she was ever left at home. And she had determined on the next occasion to assert her right.

It is true he had in a way been kind to her, a harsh word never having escaped his lips, although a coldness, which to her sensitive nature was worse than blows, gradually grew up between them.

She had a home, beautiful as any she could have imagined in her wildest fancy, whilst he had, with no niggard hand, supplied her with dresses and jewels, of which she had never dreamt; but no woman's face ever entered within her doors, no female companionship was vouchsafed her, to while away the hours when he was absent at his club, or some reunion from which she was excluded.

At first she was satisfied, he having told her that did his father know of his marriage he would disinherit him, but that was all done away with now, for the old gentleman had died some months since; and although Sydney had succeeded to his estate in — shire, and had become possessed of the town-house in Eaton-square, still he ever brought forward some excuse when asked why he did not remove to the latter, or, what was more, when she urged on him the fulfilment of his promise to proclaim her to his friends as his wife he would on every occasion evade a reply.

Since his father's death his neglect had become more apparent, and, as she told him, during the last month he had never passed one evening with her.

"Look here, Edith!" he said, as she still kept her face averted from his, "I have never denied you anything since that night when you left Hillside with me. Is there anything now that you wish for that I do not obtain it for you? Then why this constant persistency in urging me to take you where I cannot?"

"Where you cannot, and why? Am I not your wife? And I have a right to be treated as such!"

"If you were to mix with the women folk in my sphere you would only be miserable," he continued, without noticing her interruption. "They would not be backward, I can assure you, in making you feel your inferiority; and you cannot think but what I should be miserable, too, knowing that my wife was being made a laughing-stock amongst her own sex."

There was something of the old tenderness in his tone as he concluded; and when she turned he drew her towards him, hushing on her those caresses to which she had been so long a stranger, that when later on he left her for the evening she almost ceased to forget what she had so recently considered as her wrongs.

"Perhaps he is right," she soliloquised. "I know I am awfully ignorant of society ways, and women are not as a rule kind to their own sex;" then ringing the bell she gave directions that Annette should be sent to her.

Annette was a French *bonne*, the only creature to whom Edith could fly to to relieve her from the *ennui* occasioned by her loneli-

ness. She was nurse to her baby-girl, and, as such, it was not looked upon as strange that she should enjoy so much of her mistress's society.

She was a lively type of her countrywomen, seemingly devoted to her lady and her infant charge, but ever on the alert for any little excitement to give zest to the monotony of life at "The Nest." She instinctively felt there was a romance in the life of the former, which made her most curious to find out, and at times she had surprised Edith with the tears streaming from her beautiful eyes, which only added to this desire.

"Bring baby here for a little time," Edith said, as Annette appeared according to her order, and a few moments later she re-entered with the little girl in her arms.

"I was just going to put de little one to bed, madame," she said, in her broken English; "it is vava late."

"Yes, I know," Edith replied; "but I feel lonely, and a half-hour will not hurt her," and she took the child, who held out its little arms to her.

"Monsieur weel not be at home, madame?" Annette questioned, with a shrug of her shoulders.

"No; your master has an engagement for the evening," was the reply.

"And madame goes out nevers," the girl continued, with her dark eyes fixed on the face of the former, on which the colour had deepened whilst she bent it over the babe in her lap. "But, den, of course, madame knows to where monsieur is gone?"

There was something so strange in the tone of the other that it caused Edith to raise her head.

"I do not know," she said.

"Not know!" Annette exclaimed. "But, perhaps, it ees better for madame," she responded.

"Better not to know!" her mistress returned. "Explain yourself, Annette. Do you know where Captain Bonfours is gone?"

"Yes, madame," was the reply. "De coachman did tell James, and James did tell me. It was to Lady de Worms, where dere is one grand ball."

"And did James tell you anything else?" Edith asked, her head again drooping over her baby that she might hide the pain which would show itself there to the scrutinising gaze of the Frenchwoman.

"Only, madame, dat it is one beautiful house in Portland-place, *magnifique*! And dat when dere ees a ball Lady de Worms does give the grandest in London. De toilettes, oh! madame, they are *ravissante*."

"And, I suppose, that is as far as James's information goes?" Edith asked, apparently as unaffected by Annette's description as she was seemingly blind to the ecstasies in which she indulged when decanting on the beauties of the costumes. "Is Lady de Worms a widow, then?"

"Yes, madame, with one of de loveliest daughters. Oh! such beauty, and *riche*! De servants say dey no one knows what *monnaie* dey have."

"Servants fancy they know everything. But it is not all gold that glitters. However, never mind about Lady de Worms or her wealth, but just open that window; it is so warm."

"Warm! Oh! madame, it ees cold like March instead of de May."

But as Annette saw the white face of her mistress, and thinking she was about to faint, she no longer hesitated to obey her command.

"You are not well, madame?" she asked.

"Not very," Edith replied. "Bring me my hat and a wrap. I will take a turn in the garden; the air will do me good. And you can put baby to bed."

"Yes, darling, my own, my all, rather would I see you dead than that you should live to know such misery as mine!" she said, as the door closed on Annette.

And then she sat gazing into the tiny face, so like the one for which she had left mother,

home, all most dear, and for the moment her heart appeared to close against the innocent babe; but as a smile broke over the infant lips she pressed it to her bosom, almost smothering it with her caresses, when Annette re-entered the apartment.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### EDITH'S RESOLVE.

"GOOD-NIGHT, my darling!" and with another kiss on the baby face Edith placed her in the arms of Annette, from whom she took the hat and paletot she had brought for herself.

All the rebellious spirit of her girlhood leapt into her heart as she thought of Sydney, with his arm around another woman's waist, basking in the smiles of, maybe, a fashionable beauty, whilst she alone, night after night, was left to her own reflections—a bird in a gilded cage not more a prisoner than herself.

"But I will bear it no longer," she said; "he shall own me as his wife. Where he goes I will go, or I will quit his roof for ever!"

As Annette said, a cruel east wind made the bright May evening cold as in early March, but Edith felt it no further than like a fan—it cooled the fire in her brain.

For a moment she stood before the glass adjusting her attire, herself giving a start as she gazed on her own reflection.

"But eighteen months," she soliloquised, "and I look ten years older. Even Jack would scarcely recognise me; and mother, poor mother! with Paul and Bill, I wonder if they ever think of me now? But this is not the time for regret," she said, aloud, whilst she dashed the tears from her eyes; when, putting on her hat, she crept softly from the room, her footsteps falling noiselessly on the tessellated floor of the hall as she crossed it to the entrance door.

"The Nest," the name given to the pretty villa she occupied, was situated in the St. John's Wood-road, and only a few minutes elapsed before she was able to secure a cab.

"To Portland-place," she said, in answer to the man's inquiries where he should drive to.

A bright, clear moon rendered every object clear as the noonday, but Edith had no eyes for anything, the beauty of the night for her no interest, as, although the horse went at a good speed, to her it seemed an interminable distance until the driver looked through the trap to ask her what number she required.

"If this is Portland-place I will get down," she said, and on the man answering in the affirmative she jumped out.

"Can you tell me which is Lady de Worm's?" she asked, when, having dismissed the cab, she met a woman coming in the opposite direction.

"Don't know, miss," was the reply; "but you ask the policeman there," indicating with her finger to where one of the force was standing; "maybe he can tell you."

"Yes, miss," replied the officer, in answer to Edith's interrogatories, "you'll find it down on this side. You can't mistake the 'ouse, for there's a grand affair on there to-night, and there's a awning from the door to the pavement. But, excuse me, miss," he added, as Edith was about to proceed, "is it any of the servants you're wanting, for I'm afraid you won't be able to see anyone else?"

"Yes, yes," she replied, hurriedly, and without waiting to ascertain further from 112 E, Edith hastened onward.

Carriages were still driving up, from which beautiful women and handsome men stepped to the bright strip of red descending from the entrance-hall to the road, and a stream of light was visible within when the door opened and closed to admit the guests, whilst strains of delicious music came from the open windows above, where the forms of the dancers were plainly visible.

Stepping into the road that she might have better view Edith stood as though rooted to

the spot, the figures as they passed and re-passed in the mazy waltz having a peculiar fascination for her. After a time the music ceased, and she could see men and women leisurely perambulate the room, till a couple, evidently intent in conversation, approached the open window.

Another moment they had stepped on to the balcony, their faces distinctly visible in the bright moonshine; and a cry she could not control broke from her lips as Edith saw in the man, who apparently, with his arm encircling the waist of his companion, was whispering soft words in her ear, the form of Sydney.

Like a rush of waters she heard the approach of feet; and then, unconscious of the music which again floated from the ball-room on the still night air—unconscious of the interrogations from the area of the house in which she had seen her husband—she was borne by rough, though tender, hands to the kitchens beneath.

"Poor dear! and seems quite a lady too!" said the head kitchen-maid, chafing the cold hands of the senseless girl. "But what made John tell 'em to bring her down here I can't think," she added, turning to cook.

"No, nor anyone else," replied the latter; "but it is just like him. One day a lame dog, another a mangy kitten, and now a young woman, until he will turn my lady's mansion into a general hospital," and Mrs. Martin was about to turn from the scene in her indignation when she almost ran again the person in question in the shape of John with a glass of brandy.

"Give her a sip of this, ma'am," he said, addressing the former. "She was near as a toucher being run over had I not caught her just in the nick of time."

"That's all very well, John," Mrs. Martin replied, "but I don't think her ladyship would approve of your bringing strange young women into the house."

"Oh, her ladyship be bothered," said John, irreverently. "See, she's a coming round," and, without giving any heed to the expression of astonishment depicted on Mrs. Martin's countenance, he advanced to where Edith, with a faint sigh, opened her eyes.

"Are you better now, miss?" he asked.

For a moment the question remained unanswered, whilst she looked around her with a frightened gaze.

"Yes, I am better, thank you," she said at last. "But where am I, and how did I come here?"

"Why, you were looking at the ladies and gentlemen, I suppose, but I know I heard a scream, and you were falling backwards when I caught you in time to save you from being run over."

"You were very kind," she answered, looking into John's face. "But whose house is this?"

"Lady de Worms," said Mrs. Martin, who now advanced.

"Lady de Worms; yes, I know, I know," she replied, rising.

"Do you know her ladyship, then?" the former asked, noticing the start which the mention of the name had occasioned.

"No," Edith said, faintly. "I don't know more than that Lady de Worms is a widow lady, and has a beautiful daughter."

"You are right there," said the kitchen-maid, "the beautifullest young lady you ever see'd, as good as she is beautiful, too. But how did you know anything about them?"

"Merely from hearsay," replied Edith, anxious to learn more. "Someone who once lived in the family, and she spoke so much of the young lady's beauty that I should like to see her."

"And so you shall," answered the former, "for I am sure Mrs. Martin won't have any objection, if you likes to come round the day she is to be married, when you will see her in her bridal dress."

"No, I don't mind," that lady replied, after a strict scrutiny of Edith's general ap-

pearance, and having come to the conclusion that she was respectable. "I suppose you are living with your parents?"

"No," was the response. "You see I am a married woman," and Edith pointed to her wedding-ring.

"Well, if you can. Of course you know your own affairs best," Mrs. Martin replied. "I shall be glad to see you on the twelfth, that is a fortnight to-day, though for my own part I am sorry our young lady should not look higher than to marry a mere captain."

Mrs. Martin had been in the family from the time Adela de Worms was an infant in arms, and, as with each year of her life she had become more beautiful, she, like the majority of old servants, considered that nothing under a marquis was high enough to be the husband of the former.

"Oh! Mrs. Martin!" exclaimed the kitchen maid, "I'm sure as how you couldn't find a nicer gentleman than Captain Bonfour."

"Captain Bonfour!" it was Edith who spoke, the colour forsaking her face, whilst a sudden trembling seized her limbs. "Captain Sydney Bonfour, do you mean?" she exclaimed, as with difficulty she prevented herself from falling.

"Yes," replied the cook-housekeeper, who now began to eye the girl with suspicion; "but how came you to know the captain's name? It strikes me, young woman, you had better get home as fast as you can."

"Yes, let me go, let me go!" said Edith, vainly endeavouring to hide her excitement as she moved towards the door. "Thank you so much for your kindness," and she pressed the rough, red hand of the kitchen-maid. "Good-bye."

"Good-bye," repeated the latter, and then in a whisper, "I'll be on the look out for you on the twelfth."

But Edith made no reply further than a sad look into the kind eyes which rested on her, and then she ascended the area steps, and went out into the moonlight, whilst the strains of music still floated from those windows on the evening air, filling her mind with maddening reflections.

#### CHAPTER V.

##### FLIGHT.

BUT a short time elapsed before Edith was again beneath her own roof. Annette was surprised on viewing the white face of her young mistress, but she had to be content for the reason assigned for her pallor that it was cold enough for February; and yet, as their hands came in contact, the French woman declared those of the former were like burning coals.

"I shall not require you any more to-night, Annette," she said; and on the girl leaving the room she drew her chair towards the fire, which, although it being the end of May, burn't cheerfully in the grate. She scarcely heeded the hours as they passed, while with her hands pressed to her throbbing temples she recalled the memories of the past. Her eyes appeared to scorch in their sockets; not a tear came to her relief, whilst thoughts which madness alone could engender surged through her brain.

The pale blue of early morning made itself visible in the apartment, the gilt hands of the ormolu clock pointing to five o'clock, when the sound of a key turning in the outer door fell on her ear, and a moment later Sydney entered the room.

"Good heavens! Edith," he exclaimed, "do you mean to say you have not been to bed?" and he made a movement as though to kiss her, but suddenly starting from her chair, she confronted him, her eyes blazing at the thought of her wrongs, whilst her bosom heaved with her excitement.

"Keep off, Sidney," she cried; "insult me no further by the mockery of a love you never felt. As you say all through these weary hours I have never sought my bed, waiting



for you, that from your own lips I may learn your perfidy, or hear you before Heaven swear that what I have this night learnt is a lie."

"What is it that you mean? I am at a loss to understand," he replied.

"I mean your proposed marriage with Adela de Worms."

He started at the unexpected charge, unable for the moment to answer the girl, whose whole happiness or misery hung upon his reply, whilst she, so anxious to learn her fate, failed almost to notice his silence as she continued in an imploring tone,—

"Tell me, Sydney, that it is not true. Tell me that it is some hideous dream, that I am, indeed, your wife—your own true wife?"

She had forgotten the passion which had so lately nerved her to despise him, as in his presence the old love surged to her heart, when, throwing herself at his feet, she clasped his knees, the tears now gushing from her beautiful eyes, whilst she implored him for the sake of their child to tell her the truth.

"Come here, Edith," he said, gently raising her from the carpet. "I am at a loss to know what you have learnt, or from whom; but further deception is useless. I love you, my darling, more than any woman that was ever created, and when you have heard what I have to say I feel, dearest, you will forgive me."

"Forgive you, Sydney!" she exclaimed, attempting to rise from the couch towards which he had drawn her; "then you have deceived me. I am not your wife," and she would have torn herself from his embrace had he not enfolded her in his strong arms.

"Listen, Edith, before you condemn."

His tone was so soft, his eyes looking into hers with that love-light which had made her leave kindred, home, all for his sake, and unresistingly she yielded to his request, whilst he continued,—

"You remember, Edith, when we first met. It was during my father's lifetime, when I was dependent upon him for every penny I possessed, his wish being that I should leave the service, and settle down as a country gentleman, it having been arranged some years previous that I should marry Adela de Worms, my cousin, so as to keep the families united."

"This my father, who was devotedly attached to his only sister, Lady de Worms, made me swear to do, or else, as he stated, and afterwards specified in his will, in the event of my refusing to carry out his wish that he bequeathed his estate, and all appertaining thereto, with such personal property as that of which he was possessed, to her ladyship absolutely for her life, after which it was to go to her daughter, leaving me a complete beggar."

"And you wooed me knowing this, Sydney?"

"I loved you, Edith," he answered, "as I could never love again, and in my madness, my selfishness, I could not give you up. I knew I could not gain you but in one way—as my supposed wife; and in the sight of Heaven you are my wife still!"

"No, no!" she cried, tearing herself from his caresses, her woman's spirit again coming to her aid. "Unhand me before I come to hate you—you who stole my purest affections to trample them in the dust, who, to serve your own ends, made me lend myself to a mock marriage that I might at last, when the novelty was passed, find myself, as I do now, a dishonoured woman, a forsaken mis—"

"No, no, don't say so," Sydney interrupted. "Never will I forsake you, never shall I cease to love you. You are, ever shall be, first in my heart, Edith. I am rich. You shall never want for home or affection."

"And do you think," she added, scornfully, whilst she dashed aside the tears which had gathered in her eyes, "that I would share your love with another—that I would play Fair Rosamond to her Eleanor? No, Sydney Bonfour, a thousand times no! The scales have at last been lifted from my eyes. It is but the oft-repeated story of man's perfidy and

woman's faith. I go with mine broken, never to be placed again in anything human. Good-bye, and may Heaven forgive you, as I will pray Heaven to help me to do."

She merely held to him the little pink hand which for the last time should be pressed in his. No further reproach passed her lips, her eyes alone speaking of the agony which was wringing her heart; whilst with one look of mingled pain and love at the guilty man, whose grief was as great as hers, to whose prayers and entreaties she turned a deaf ear, with a sorrow too great for words, she pressed one burning kiss on the hand which then released her own, and left the room.

The gray of the early morn' gradually gave way as the sun arising from his bed of gold threw his rays into the room where Sydney still sat, his head resting on his hands as he reviewed in his mind the scene which had been so lately enacted.

It was nearly eight o'clock, and signs of human life aroused him to the fact that a new day had commenced. How long he had remained where Edith had left him he scarcely knew, whilst the recollection occurred to him as the phantasies of a horrible dream.

He had sat there, almost unconscious of aught around him, the tick, tick of the little ormolu clock the only sound in the dead stillness, save the opening of a door, as gently closed, and then forgotten, as he still mused over the bitterness of that scene, and endeavoured to stamp out of his life the memory of a love which would not die.

And Edith, ascending to her own room, after leaving him as she had done, noiselessly collected a few trinkets to help her, as it might be, in the future, which she placed in a small handbag, then bending her steps towards the swing cot where her child rested, she moved aside the lace curtains to gaze for a moment on the innocent babe gently slumbering within, the next to lift it as gently from its downy bed, when enveloping it beneath the soft fur of the cloak she had wrapped around her own slight form, she as quietly descended the carpeted stairs, and went out into the grey dawn of the early morn.

## CHAPTER VI.

### AN AVERTED CRIME.

As she emerged from her husband's home Edith felt a relief when the cool, bright air of the May morning played on her temples, so hot and throbbing. The unconscious babe still slept in her arms, the mother's greatest fear that she should awake.

There were but few people about, and those mostly of the labouring class, who with their breakfast tied up in a red handkerchief, which they carried, together with a tin can, were whistling gaily, as though care and trouble were to them unknown; but, nevertheless, Edith fancied one or two looked strangely at her as they passed, and she was glad to get into the park to avoid observation.

The sun had by this time risen bright in the blue heavens, and, undecided as to her next movement, she sat down to collect her thoughts.

Her baby had become restless, and taking from her bag the bottle of milk with which she had provided herself, she soon soothed it to rest.

"Could any in this beautiful world be so wretched as she?" she thought, as her eyes wandered over the quiet serenity of the scene, the bright green of the smooth-mown grass, the freshness of the young leaves, on which the early sun shone in all its brilliancy, reflecting their new beauty in the silvery stream, where the ducks, performing their ablutions, quacked to each other in their enjoyment of life, and for the time her great trouble appeared to fade beneath the influence of that glad, young morning.

How long she thus remained she scarcely knew, but as the stream of life began to merge before her it recalled her to her situation; and

pressing the now sleeping babe to her breast she arose, nurses with their youthful charges peering into that wild, white face as she passed them in her exit from the park gates.

She had tasted nothing since the preceding evening, so resolved to adjourn, in the first instance, to some quiet confectioner's shop, where she could obtain refreshment.

"Have you a time-table?" she asked the woman who was evidently proprietress of the one she entered, as, in answer to her request for a cup of coffee and a slice of toast, the former placed the same before her, asking her to enter a little room adjoining.

"Yes'm," she replied, and returning almost instantly with the same. "What line is it you are wanting?" she asked; "I'll find it for you with pleasure if you like, seeing you've got the baby. What a dear little soul," she continued, looking searchingly at the latter, who, with nothing but its little laced night-dress, lay wrapped in its mother's cloak.

She had a nice, kind face, this strange woman, and, as she addressed, in baby lingo, endearing words to the helpless infant, Edith could not restrain the mother-love which leapt to her heart, whilst she thought of her fatherless babe; and the tears she endeavoured to keep back fell on the rosy face, whilst her own, so sad, bent over the tiny form.

But a customer coming in at the time Mrs. Newton was called away from the inner room where Edith sat, and when she returned all traces of her sudden emotion had passed.

"Let's see, where did you say you wanted to go to?" asked the latter, returning to Edith with the railway guide still in her hand, having laid it down on the counter the while she was engaged in the shop.

"To Hillside," was the reply. "I am afraid I shall be too late for the noonday train."

"Yes, that you will," Mrs. Newton answered, looking at the clock; "but there's one goes at six o'clock. Is anyone expecting you?" her woman's curiosity being now thoroughly aroused, as her eyes fell on the rich, though unsuitable, attire of both mother and child.

Mrs. Newton knew Hillside well, as she told Edith; a straggling place enough, a house here and a cottage there, as though people were afraid to live near each other, and a church in the midst, to which one had to walk a mile to Sunday service.

"I am going to my mother's," Edith said; after the former having told her that it was years since she was there, and likely to be as many again before she would in the future.

"Oh! then you used to lived at Hillside," Mrs. Newton continued on her return again from the shop where trade began to be brisk. "Perhaps you knew the Pegrams?"

"I have heard the name," Edith answered, bending low over her child, rather to hide her face from the searching look of Mrs. Newton than to still the cry of the former. "Mrs. Pegram kept a school there."

"Oh! a school, did she?" replied the woman. "Well, she is my sister, only I've never seen her since her husband's death, when she left London with her three children—it must be getting or for seven year now—to live down there, and from that day this I've heard no more of her although I did go down once to try and find her out but, lor' those country places gives me the horrors. And after asking a country bumpkin or two if they could tell me where such a person lived, they gave me a stare and that was all, and I came back as wise as I started. But the time is getting on. Won't you have a chop, or anything, before you go to the station?"

"No, I thank you," replied Edith, rising and wrapping her cloak round the child. "I will take a few biscuits and a little fresh milk for baby, and then I will go."

The same was speedily procured, when, bidding Mrs. Newton good-bye, Edith emerged into the busy street, where she hastily engaged a cab to drive her to the station. Her intention was to return to Hillside, to beg her mother's pardon, and implore her to give her

her protection. Of that mother's love she felt sure, undisturbed, as she had been. She would not, when she had heard her sad story, refuse her the forgiveness for which she would plead. And as the train bore her quick—quick from the great metropolis where she had known such misery—as the pure fresh air of the country came over the hills to kiss her wan, faded face—she felt it as a foretaste of that peace which was awaiting her, and a sense of happiness even came into her young heart when she alighted at her destination.

She had no fear that any of the villagers she might, perchance, meet would recognise in that pale, worn face the girl who had left them in all the freshness of her youthful beauty but a short eighteen months since; and the hour was late as well, the shadows of evening creeping stealthily over hill and dale, making the way dull and gloomy, over which the large oaks spread their branches, and the new-born leaves whispered softly to each other.

She began to feel very weary, her light burden making her arms ache; and a light of gladness leapt into her eyes when the chimneys of Myrtle Lodge came in view, though a shudder passed through her frame as thoughts of when she last saw it crowded through her mind.

Suddenly a dreadful fear took possession of her. The cottage—the home to which she would have returned—stood before her like an empty tomb; no light shone from the lattice windows; no smoke arose from the chimneys to speak of life within, whilst the darkness gathered like a pall over all.

Struggling against an undefined dread she advanced to the little gate. It was locked—a padlock too—the safer to secure it again intruders, and merciful heavenly as the moon shone with almost a supernatural light from the clouds which had before obscured her, Edith read on a large bill in the parlour window, "To Let."

"Gone!" she cried, in an agony of despair. "Oh! mother, brothers, I am indeed punished for my sin," whilst drooping on the damp, still ground, she burst into a flood of tears.

Sob after sob broke from her bosom, to which she closely pressed her infant in her mad grief; and then, as the latter's wail fell on her ear, a sudden resolve seemed to take possession of her, when wildly leaping to her feet she fled from the shadow of the leaves as they fell over the little garden now overgrown with weeds and thistles.

"Don't tempt me, don't tempt me!" she cried, beating the air as though driving something back. "Heaven! am I mad?"

But her words were lost on the still night air, on which no sound fell but the rippling of the quiet waters, as they glided on beneath the moonbeams in the river, along the banks of which she had so often wandered in those happy bygone days, and to which now she hurried, a strange fascination urging her once more to gaze upon the silvery stream, that weird voice still ringing in her ears, until she came nearer, nearer to the river's bank.

Her hat had fallen back from her golden head, her hair waved hither and thither as the night breeze played with her yellow tresses, whilst the moon, riding high in the heavens, shone down on a white scared face, from which the blue eyes started with the fire of madness.

"Better so, better so," she said, when, casting aside the cloak which covered it, she impressed hot, burning kisses on her baby's face. Then with one gaze to the heavens where the clouds were again gathering over the moon's disc, she plunged it into the silent waters beneath. One moment she stood rooted to the spot, when the sound of a human tread fell on her ear, and like a wild animal at bay she fled with a scream which rent the stillness of the midnight air.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE OLD STORY AND THE NEW.

The day was far advanced when Sydney Bonfleur awoke in the room to which he had adjourned after that last scene with Edith. His sleep had been broken and filled with terrible dreams, and long before he resumed consciousness he became aware of an unusual stir around him, until a scream from Annette caused him to open his eyes and thoroughly arouse him to a sense that it was something more than fancy which had disturbed his slumber, and then a fear that something dreadful had happened taking possession of his brain, he lost no time in ascertaining what it meant.

"What is all that noise about downstairs?" he asked, as James appeared, in answer to his summons.

"It is Annette, sir," was the reply, "in hysterics in the kitchen, for Mrs. Bonfleur is nowhere in the house, nor the baby neither, and she is sure something has happened to them."

"Then Annette is very foolish," said Sydney, although the colour so suddenly forebode his face that the man thought he was about to faint. "Very likely your mistress has gone for a walk, not wishing to breakfast till I come down."

"That's not likely, sir," James answered, "for Annette says the child was taken from its cot, not even dressed."

"Well, you can go; I will see Annette in the breakfast-room in a few minutes," and James left the room, whilst Sydney hastily performed his toilet, with his heart beating tumultuously in his bosom.

Never till that moment, when the fear of having lost her appeared to him, did he know how fondly he loved the poor girl, whom he had so cruelly deceived, and how gladly would he renounce the beautiful Adela, and all the advantages to be derived through his union with her, for one glimpse of Edith's fair face—one word of forgiveness from her beloved lips.

But the bright spring day wore on, and no sign of her return. Servants were sent in every direction, but no tidings of his beloved, until all hope sank within his breast; and his heart went out with a cruel wail of anguish, as he returned late at night to his desolate and forsaken home.

But hope, which springs eternal in the human breast, came to him when his grief was greatest. Her mother's home! Might she not have fled there with her babe? So, with the early light he was again up, for how could he rest, unconscious of her fate? And, with the first train going thither he was on his way to Hillside.

How the beauty of that spring morning seemed to mock him in his agony; the songs of the birds sounding as the voices of reproaching spirits in his ears, and it was a relief when they drew up at the little village terminus.

He lost not a moment, impatient of the least delay, as he started on the road he knew so well, leading to the widow's cottage; but he had not advanced many yards between the two hedges, where the yellow primroses grew in sweet profusion, each side of a shady lane, when he discerned the figure of a man approaching from the opposite direction.

As the latter advanced he felt the colour forsake his face, and his limbs trembled beneath him for what was he to say to this man whom he had robbed of his heart's dearest treasure—who had consigned to his care all that he held most dear?

A start was also perceptible in the form of the other as they met. Suddenly he stayed his footsteps, astonishment for the moment apparently depriving him of speech; then he advanced to Sydney's side, a dangerous light gleaming in his eyes.

"Well met, Sydney Bonfleur," he exclaimed. "And what of Edith? Do you bring me good tidings of my lost love?"

There was something in his tone which the

former was at a loss to understand. Surely, she and Jack Hartman had not met, and he had heard her tale of broken faith? But the jeering insolence of the man's manner restored him to himself, and roused his spirit to meet the threatening attitude of the other, as, with a motion of his arm, he removed him from his path.

"I do not see," he answered, "that either I or my wife are responsible to you for our actions; still, if you are so anxious to know her movements, at this time I believe her to be with her mother, whither I am going to fetch her. Allow me to pass."

But John Hartman was before him, his hand at his throat, the fury of a wild beast gleaming from his eyes.

"Liar and coward!" he cried, flinging him from him. "You know she is not there. Where is she?"

Rising to his feet, a fear greater than that evoked by the presence of his antagonist overcame Sydney. "If not there, then where was she?" being the thought which rushed through his brain.

"I know not," he answered; "would to Heaven I did!"

"You know not?" repeated the other, relaxing his hold. "And yet you swore to love and protect her?"

"And I did," Sydney replied. "Through a jealous whim she left me. But if you know anything of where she is, John Hartman, for Heaven's sake, tell me?"

But the latter took no notice of his entreaties, his mind apparently lost in thought, and a terrible grief revealing itself on his countenance.

"A jealous whim!" he repeated to himself. "Yes, yes; the old story. And I would not have given her cause for a moment's unhappiness. Oh! Edith, my love, my love!"

He had buried his face in his hands, great tears welling through his rough fingers; then, as the paroxysm of his grief passed away, he raised his head to see in the sorrowful face of his rival the reflection of his own bitter trouble.

"Oh! Heaven, that I could tell you where she is," he replied, in a milder tone. "I saw her last night with the moon shining down on her white, worn face, a wild agony in her blue eyes, as she neared the water's edge, and I hastened my steps that I might arrest her before she could carry out the intention which even in the moonlight I could see imprinted on her countenance."

"And you did, man? Tell me that you saved her!" asked Sydney, in his excitement, not waiting the termination of what the other had to say.

And John Hartman stood for some moments silent, watching the agony his rival was enduring, feeling an inward satisfaction that the sufferings of his mind should equal his own; and then he answered slowly, letting each word fall as burning coals on the ears of his listener,—

"I was too late. I heard a plunge, a splash, and on reaching the river's brink I saw but the quiet waves as they washed over the grave of your child!"

"And Edith?" asked Sydney, breathlessly.

"She fled like a madwoman from the spot, for hours evading me in my pursuit; but at last I found her, faint and exhausted, crouched down beneath a hedge."

"And you saved her? Heaven bless you! You saved her?" and Sydney grasped the hand of his companion in his now-born gratitude, forgetting all in that moment of thankfulness but that Edith lived, in the joy of which even the death of his child, with its fearful consequences, fell into insignificance, even Jack feeling pity for him as he continued,—

"I lifted her from the ground, and hiding her lean on me for support—for she was helpless as an infant—I led her to a cottage close by, where I knew she would be well cared for."

"And they took her in?" gasped Sydney.

"They did."



"Then take me to her," he pleaded, in reply to Jack's response, "that on my bended knees I may plead for forgiveness at her feet; and if a lifetime of devotion can obliterate the past, believe me it shall be here."

"An idle resolve," replied his companion, "for will not the stream reveal the secret which now lies buried beneath its surface?" and he looked steadfastly at the man, who shuddered at the meaning his words conveyed.

"But surely we can save her?" he asked.

"Save her!" ejaculated the other, "when she has herself already fled, no one knows whither, with the shadow of her awful crime ever present with her! Yes," he continued in the stillness of the night, "she left the protection of the people into whose hands I had consigned her, and went out, leaving not a track behind her."

Then after a pause, as though unable further to control his feelings, he turned to where the wretched man stood before him, his every sense paralysed beneath the weight of his terrible sorrow.

"And this is your work, Sydney Bonfour!" he added.

But a groan alone escaped from the lips of his miserable companion, who, throwing his arms above his head, suddenly fell forward at his feet.

It was but a second's work to turn him round, that the light might fall upon his pallid features; but the eyes were opened now with a glassy stare, when, quickly unfastening his vest, Jack pressed his hand upon his heart, but its beatings had ceased for ever.

Sydney Bonfour was dead.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### SORROW FOLLOWS ON.

On that night when Edith fled from the people in whose hands John Hartman had placed her, like the recollection of a fearful dream the remembrance of her crime came back to her, the truth of which, now that her senses had in a measure returned, she could not bring her mind to believe. But, then, where was her babe?

And as this question kept presenting itself to her the fearful reality took possession of her brain; till in all its horrible certainty she became convinced of the dreadful crime to which her madness had led her; and in the terror which overcame her, as the consequences of her act presented itself to her imagination, she fled from the roof which would have protected her.

The day had already dawned, and a strange fascination leading her to the spot where the waters still rolled on, hiding all evidence of her guilt, she seated for a moment beside its banks, when it all came back to her recollection in its vividness.

Yes, she remembered all then; the discovery of her husband's perfidy, her journey to Hillside, to her mother's home to find it deserted, and then the wild impulse which led her to the river's brink, and then—oh, heavens!—the murder of her child. And as she began to realise the jeopardy in which she stood—as the evidence of her crime would assuredly be brought home to her—a wish to save her own life took hold of her.

It was not that she feared death, but the love of living became greater, as her days seemed already numbered. And after viewing her haggard countenance in the limpid waters, kissed by the early rays of the morning sun, she turned her footsteps towards the little station, so as to catch the first train for London.

Once in the labyrinth of the great city she felt her chances of escape doubled. The few pounds, with one or two trinkets which she had brought with her from The Nest on the previous day, would keep her from want until she could procure some means of subsistence.

So the first thing on her arrival in the metropolis was to procure a lodging where she could not only gain the rest she needed,

but have time to collect her thoughts as to her future.

Although as a shadow the memory of that night ever haunted her footsteps, still her youth, her natural hopeful temperament, served in a great measure to calm her fears, whilst she formed a resolution to find out, if possible, the whereabouts of her mother and brothers, trusting to that mother's love to enable her without danger to unburden her mind of her terrible secret.

Edith had now been two days in her new abode, when going out to make a few necessary purchases her attention became riveted on a poster outside a paper shop in the locality, on which in large letters appeared a line,—

"SUDDEN DEATH OF A GENTLEMAN AT HILLSIDE," and she was about to enter the same to purchase a paper, when she became conscious of someone close to her, for whom the line also seemed to have an attraction, when, on turning, she discovered it to be Mrs. Newton, at whose house she had breakfasted but three days ago.

"Good evening," said that lady, recognising in Edith at once the strange customer of the other morning. "Did you get the train all right the day you wanted to go to Hillside?"

"Yes, I thank you," replied the latter, making a step nearer the shop door; but Mrs. Newton was not so easily to be thrown off, as she continued,—

"I see you are going to buy a paper to see what that is," and she pointed to the conspicuous announcement. "So am I. But how is baby? And did you hear anything of the Pegrams down there?"

Both questions being asked in the same breath Edith had time to recover herself before Mrs. Newton could notice the pallor which pervaded her features at the mention of the first, whilst to the latter she replied,—

"They were gone, and the school closed."

"Well, now, that is strange," Mrs. Newton answered, "for the very day you were at my place—it was near upon closing time—when a young fellow walks into my shop, and asks me if I could tell him on what line that was, and he shows me the advertisement of a cottage which was to let."

"Hillside!" says I, reading the same. "Lor', yes," and I tells him: "Do you think of taking it?" I ask.

"Yes," he says, "for his wife and he to open a school, as they understood there had been one there for years, but the party who kept it, a widow, was dead." "Do you know her name?" I asked, my heart all of a flutter like.

"Well," says he, after considering a long time, "I ought to know; the agent did tell us, but Annie is sure to remember, and he beckoned to a young woman who was looking at the cakes and things in my shop window, and says she, 'Why, Pegram,' after his asking her about it."

"Lor'," says I, "you have given me a turn. She was my sister, and I wonder what's become of the childer." "There were only two little boys, I believe," said his wife, as nice a young woman as ever you saw, "and I think, dear," she said, turning to her husband, "Mr. Brown, 'the agent,'" said they had been placed in some school by the clergymen."

"But I shall find out all about it," continued Mrs. Newton, who, in her anxiety respecting her nephews, failed by the dim light to notice the white face of her companion, as she leant by the door to save herself from falling. "I'll have no charity learning and charity food for my own sister's children—not I," and she was about to bounce in to procure her paper, when her eyes falling on Edith, "Lor', you do look bad!" she said. "Aren't you well?"

"Not very," was the reply, "and I will get home quickly; but, if you do not mind, I should like to know when you hear any news of the Pegrams, for I remember the boys well. May I come and see you?"

"May you come and see me? What an idea! Why, I shall only be too glad that you

should do so. Number 14, Church-street, don't forget," and placing a business-card, on which her name, address, and calling were plainly distinguishable, Mrs. Newton cordially shook the extended hand, whilst Edith, after having purchased her paper, hastily returned to her humble home.

Once again in her little room, feeling safe from the horrible shadow ever in her wake, she hastened to read the paragraph which had attracted her attention.

It was an account of the sudden death of Sydney Bonfour, on whose body an inquest had been held that day, when a verdict ascribing heart disease as the cause of the same was returned.

Of course there was a lengthy article, in which the noble lineage, the many amiable qualities of the deceased were fully commented on, but for Edith there were but the few words which told her *he was dead*, and in that one sentence her cup of sorrow was filled to overflowing—his neglect, his perfidy, all swallowed up in the great love now buried in his grave, as with a cry of agony she fell on the floor, overwhelmed with the tide of her mighty sorrow.

(To be concluded in our next.)

### IN A SPANISH STREET.

THE women's dress had no peculiarity except want of conformity to any contemporary fashion. I met two or three groups of peasants in thick woollen petticoats of old gold colour with a cherry border, black bodices, and cherry kerchiefs; some of the men wore the red basque berret, but the predominating hues were black and brown.

The streets were thronged all day long, but nobody seemed to be going any whither, or to have anything to do, except for an hour on Sunday morning, when everybody was going to or from church; that was my only glimpse of the upper classes, and they too wore the cloak or mantilla-veil, according to sex.

The ladies were for the most part dressed in black, with crape veils instead of lace.

Walking by twos and threes, their misal clasped in their hands, and a long silver rosary dangling before them, their dark eyes, cast down under their long black eyelashes, they looked like members of a religious order. I saw a few handsome faces, the outline oval the features regular, the complexion like ivory, the hair, brows, and eyes dark as night.

As a rule, the faces of both men and women were too strongly marked for beauty, the features tended to coarseness, the skin to wrinkles and sallowness, the brows to grow too close and heavy. An expression of gravity, dignity and reserve in almost every face redeemed it from commonness.

The men are not tall, but well knit. The soldiers strike one as under size, on an average; the officers are fine men, but the distinction is more in their bearing than in height.

AN UNLOVELY VISITOR.—It is a singular fact that the wild animal known as the candid man is never able to see your good qualities, but he snaps at your bad ones like a hungry trout at a fly. He looks you all over with his critical microscope, and if there is something good in your life does he take it gently in his hands, hold it up to the sunshine, turn it round to get a better view, and put it back in its place with the remark, "That's worth having, and I'm glad you have it; try and get some more of the same kind!" Never. We say it very emphatically, Never! He is not candid in that way. But let him catch a glimpse of a fib and he will chase it as a weasel does a rat, and when he has caught it he will hold it up with an air of triumph, as though he had no other business in life than to hunt for such things, and then deliver a forty minutes discourse on the ultimate destination of people who tell fibs, and end by saying with an air of deprecation, "I'm candid, and always say what I think."

## HILDA'S FORTUNES.

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## CHAPTER XLV.

LORD DERING's surprise may be better imagined than described when he came into the library to welcome Eric—of whose arrival he had been informed—and was told by the Earl that his friend was in reality his elder brother.

In a few words Lord Westlynn gave all the explanation that was necessary, and then Arthur turned round to Eric, and grasped his hand with even more than his usual affection.

"To say I am glad is to say little!" he exclaimed, with deep feeling in his voice, that sufficiently vouched for his sincerity.

If the Earl had for one moment feared that Arthur would begrudge his elder brother the title and dignity he had so long enjoyed, he was entirely relieved from any such fear by the young man's manner, which was cordiality itself; indeed, the thought of losing the position as heir to the Earldom never once crossed Arthur's mind, and the only sensations he experienced were entirely pleasurable.

"What are you going to do about my grandmother?" he asked, when particulars of the story had been given him.

"Do about your grandmother?" repeated the Earl, rather vaguely.

"Yes. She must know that her evil plots have failed, and that this house cannot be her home for the future," said the young man, sternly. "We had better ask her to come down, and have it out with her as soon as possible."

The message was sent by a footman, and in a very short time the Dowager answered it in person. She glared angrily at Eric, who bowed profoundly as he placed her a chair.

"What do you want with me?" she asked, taking no notice of the salutation, as she turned to her son-in-law.

"First of all, I want to introduce to you my eldest son—Lord Dering," responded the Earl, placing his hand on Eric's shoulder.

Lady Hawkeley grew livid, and sank down on the chair as if her strength had suddenly deserted her.

"It has come at last!" she muttered, below her breath.

"Yes," Lord Westlynn continued, sternly, "after all these years, justice is about being rendered, and the boy whose birthright you tried so hard to steal will at last have his rights, and assume his proper name and position. Your share in deceiving me is known."

"Has Anne Lloyd betrayed me?" she interrupted, seeing that further attempts at concealment were useless.

"No; but that 'Providence which shapes our ends, rough hew them as we will,' has decreed that your machinations should come to naught. In Anne Lloyd's safe was found the certificate of my marriage with Flora Graham, and there is not the slightest difficulty in proving Eric Verrall to be my son—the son you told me died a few weeks after his mother, and of whose burial you showed me the forged certificate."

"It was not forged," she said, with a harsh laugh, "for a child named 'Frederick George' did die at that time, and I only took advantage of that circumstance. I have done nothing for which the law can touch me."

"No," put in Arthur, with fine scorn; "but if you have kept within the limits of the law your conduct is no less despicable to all honest and right-minded people."

She put up her hands with a gesture of entreaty that was almost despairing.

"You ought not to blame me, Arthur. What I did was for your sake."

"That is no excuse."

"It should be in your eyes," she said, pitifully. "I loved you so well that I would have hesitated at nothing that could benefit you."

"But you did this wrong before I was born!"

"Yes, and then I acted in the interests of your mother, who I saw fading before my eyes, and all for love of Lord Westlynn. If he had known he had a son living, he would probably have refrained from marrying again."

"We will not speak of that," exclaimed the Earl, hastily, fearing to have his dead wife's name dragged into the discussion. "The point to be insisted on now is that Dering Court is no longer a suitable home for you, and the sooner you leave it, the less awkward it will be for all parties concerned."

Without a word she got up, and casting one glance of malignant hatred on Eric quitted the room.

That same evening she left Dering Court, never to return to it again.

To Eric, the events that had happened, and the fact that he was, instead of a penniless soldier, the acknowledged son and heir of Lord Westlynn, seemed more like a dream than a reality; but out of the chaos of exciting sensations one fact presented itself with vivid clearness—he was now in a position to tell Hilda his love, and woo her without fear of misinterpretation.

Soon after Lady Hawkeley's departure from the library, he drew Arthur into the window recess, and said, in a low voice,—

"Is Miss Fitzherbert still at the Castle?"

A change came over his hearer's face—so sudden and so marked, that a foreboding of evil seized on the young man almost before the last word left his lips.

"There is something wrong!" he exclaimed, quickly; "what has happened to Hilda?"

For a moment Arthur could not speak, and Eric was thrown into a fever of suspense by his silence.

"Tell me the worst," he entreated, his breath coming in sharp gasps, as he caught hold of his half-brother's arm, and pressed it excitedly. "Is she ill?"

"Worse than that."

"Then she is dead!" cried our hero, and without another word he turned and left the room, rushing out into the air as if he were on the point of suffocation.

Of his horror and despair it is impossible to speak. Just in the moment of his triumph—just as he raised the sparkling cup of happiness to his lips, and tasted the brimming elixir it contained—Fate intervened, and with remorseless hand dashed the goblet in fragments at his feet.

His had been no boy's love—no ephemeral fancy, born of a woman's beauty, and fanned into a flame by syren smiles, but the one strong passion of a man's life—the love that is strong as death! He felt like a gambler who has staked his all on one throw of the dice, and—lost!

In the madness of his despair one idea dominated the rest—he must see Hilda, yes, even though the dread conqueror had set his seal on her brow. What in life had been denied him Death should yield, for he would press his warm, living lips to her pale dead ones, and consecrate a vow that henceforward his life should be devoted to her memory—no other woman should ever take her place!

He walked on to the Castle, passed unchallenged through the Hall, and on the staircase met Mr. Fox, who, worried and anxious as he himself was, stared in astonishment at the haggard features of the young officer.

"Let me see her—take me to her!" Eric entreated, forgetful of all conventionalities in the depth of his grief; "no one on earth loved her so well as I—no one has a better right to look upon her."

Mr. Fox was not a romantic man, but he was keenly touched by the young man's sorrow, and without another word took him upstairs, unlocked a door, and ushered him into a dark room, where he left him—but only to stand on the landing outside, and watch that no one else visited the chamber of death.

Reverently and tenderly Eric lifted the sheet from the face of the dead girl, and gazed down

at the pale loveliness, which, in its perfect stillness and beauty, looked like some exquisite marble image. A quantity of white flowers were strewn about, lilies, hyacinths, narcissus, and a few white violets, the scent of which lay heavily on the close air.

"Hilda!" murmured her lover, "my beautiful Hilda, is not my love strong enough to save you from Death? I think if I were in your place, and your dear lips called me, my soul would come back!"

He knelt by the side of the bed, then got up, and in a sudden excess of passionate grief bent over her, holding her in his arms, pressing his lips to hers, calling her by every endearing name; repeating over and over again how dearly he loved her, and how life held no other hope than that of meeting her in the "better land."

As he kissed her, it seemed to him her lips grew warm, her body less fixed in its rigidity, her eyelids trembled; and then, as he asked himself if he were not the victim of an hallucination, her eyes opened, and then she looked at him with living consciousness in her gaze!

A loud cry burst involuntarily from the young man, and made Mr. Fox hurry into the room, frightened and amazed.

"What is the matter?" he exclaimed, pausing on the threshold. "What does this mean?"

"It means that Love is stronger than Death—that Hilda, who was supposed to be dead, lives!" responded Eric, in a strange, half-strangled voice that, if he had been a woman, would have turned to hysterics.

## CHAPTER XLVI.

Yes, it was even so. Hilda had indeed been rescued from the very jaws of the grave—called back, by the voice of love, from the grasp of the cruel enemy, who had been so near conquering her.

No need to describe the surprise of Dr. Freeman when he appeared on the scene—the wild excitement and confusion that pervaded the Castle when the news became known. Even Mary Goode, cold and callous as she was to everyone save herself and her own belongings, was thrown entirely off her balance by it, and for a few moments, relaxed the watch she had been deputed to keep on Evelyn, who, for the last twenty-four hours, had been virtually a prisoner in her own room.

Evelyn, when told by Mr. Fox of the crime of which she was suspected, had vowed she was innocent—and finding her protestations unheeded had relapsed into moody silence, only broken when Mary Goode had triumphantly revealed to her her identity, and told her the purpose for which she had come to Dering Castle.

Then Evelyn's composure had given way, and a sudden panic had seized her. She saw in this dark-browed woman the Nemesis who was destined to track her to her doom, and a gloomy depression settled upon her. She had, in her calculations, overrated her powers of endurance, for she fancied she would be able to remain mistress of herself through all the excitement that would naturally follow her cousin's death. For suspicion falling upon her she was entirely unprepared; her plans had been laid so carefully, her abstraction of the poison from Nadir's cabinet, so skilfully and secretly accomplished, that discovery had seemed well-nigh impossible; hence Mr. Fox's accusation had fallen upon her with all the force and suddenness of a thunderbolt.

When—all anxiety to know what was happening outside—the nurse left her, Evelyn immediately determined to take advantage of her liberty. For in her hurry Mary Goode had left the door ajar, and Evelyn was of course unaware of the nature of the excitement, whose echoes had dimly reached her own chambers.

Quick as lightning, her subtle brain weighed the pros and cons of her present position, and



she rapidly came to the conclusion that circumstantial evidence was strongly against her, and that, added to the testimony of the nurse, it would be sufficient to procure her conviction.

She shuddered, as the picture of a court of justice—the eager spectators, the judge in his black cap—presented itself to her mental vision; in point of fact, the strain on her mind was too great, and beneath it her former indomitable courage gave way, and her one hope lay in flight.

No sooner had Mary Goode disappeared than Evelyn went to her writing-table, took from it a case of jewels—none other than the Fitzherbert family diamonds—and then, putting on her hat and mantle, she slipped from the room into the passage, at the end of which was a door, leading by a staircase little used into the garden. Through this she passed, unheard and unseen, and thus she passes from this story.

As for Hilda, weak and fragile as a snow-drop that has just lifted its head above the ground, she was, nevertheless, fated to a speedy recovery; and it may be questioned whether this happy result was not hastened by the fervent words of love that had fallen from Eric's lips, as she lay in the trance from which he had awakened her.

Of course the young soldier—half frantic with joy, as he had a few minutes before been with grief—was instantly banished from her chamber, of which Dr. Freeman and the nurse took possession, while Mr. Fox telegraphed to town for a physician, who had made poisons and their effects a special study, and who, when he came to Dering Castle, and was told what had happened, and shown the medicine that Dr. Freeman had already tested, was enabled to give a clear diagnosis of the case.

The poison was a deadly one, but required the utmost care in administration, for an overdose would have the effect of sending its victim into a state of coma, during which the action of the respiratory organs would be so nearly suspended as to make it well-nigh impossible for even a medical man to distinguish it from death.

If given in minute quantities it undermined the strength and constitution to such an extent that the person taking it died from weakness and exhaustion, the fatal termination being preceded by an attack of palpitation of the heart.

Evelyn, as has before been hinted, procured the poison from Nadir's cabinet, and her reason for fixing on it had been the fact of her having heard him describing its properties to Hilda during one of her lessons on chemistry. She had been very cautious in its administration until the night the heiress had declared her intention of making a will, and then cupidity had urged her to double the dose, with the effect we have seen. It should be mentioned that in his description the supposed Hindoo had said nothing about the state of coma that would supervene on a double quantity being given, for the lesson had come to an abrupt termination on Hilda being informed that visitors were awaiting her.

The nurse's rage and astonishment, when she found Evelyn gone, may be imagined. She went to Mr. Fox, and implored him to take measures for her being found; but the lawyer, after a consultation with Dr. Freeman, came to the conclusion that, on the whole, it would be best to leave Miss Monkton alone. He was sure that Hilda would never consent to having her cousin prosecuted, and as her crime had failed in its intended effect, it would serve no purpose to bring about a public exposure.

Upon this, Mary Goode, or Maria Godfrey, left the Castle, vowing that she would never rest until Evelyn had been punished for her misdeeds.

With her vengeance we have nothing to do, but it is improbable that it will ever be executed, for Miss Monkton and the Fitzherbert diamonds are now in America; and when

last heard of, that lady was on the point of marriage with a rich Yankee, who had made his money "out west," and was not particular as to his wife's antecedents.

Before very long, nursed by Mrs. Parker, and attended with zealous care by Dr. Freeman, Hilda was convalescent, and the very first day she was able to sit up a note was brought to her, accompanied by a large bouquet of white violets and maidenhair fern.

The note was signed "Eric," and it implored her to let the writer see her.

"Bring Captain Verrall up," said Hilda, a lovely flush coming on her pale cheeks. As the young man was announced, Mrs. Parker, who was one of the kindest, and most accommodating of duennas, slipped quietly from the room.

Eric came forward, and took the young girl's hand; but, for a moment, he could not speak, and his emotion seemed to communicate itself to our heroine, who trembled, and let her eyes fall beneath his intent gaze.

"Hilda!" said the young man, at length. "I can't be conventional, and greet you as an ordinary friend; my heart is so full that my feelings have passed beyond my control. I love you, dearest, and the one hope of my life is to win you. What have you to say to me?"

Her courage came back, and she lifted her clear eyes questioningly.

"I thought," she said, in a low tone, "I thought it was Evelyn you cared for. She told me she was engaged to you."

"Then she told you an untruth! You are the only woman to whom I have ever spoken one word of love," he exclaimed, hotly. "I—"

"Wait!" interrupted the girl; and then she reminded him of the scene she had witnessed in the Castle drawing-room the morning he had come to say "farewell."

Eric was a man of unsullied honour, who would have suffered anything rather than betray a woman's secret; but Evelyn, by the lie she had told, and the false position in which she had placed him, had absolved him from every obligation, and forfeited the right to exact his silence regarding the passion she had entertained for him.

As delicately as he could, he told Hilda all that had taken place between himself and her cousin, and she saw at once how she had been deceived.

"Now," he said, as he finished, "what answer have you to give me? Are you willing to ignore wealth and rank, and take a soldier of fortune for your husband?"

"Wealth and rank are nothing to me," she whispered, simply, while the quick blushes came and went on her cheeks.

"Then you will marry me?"

"Yes,"—in a whisper too low to be heard by anyone save a lover.

He uttered an exclamation, and seized her in his arms, and then, for a few blissful seconds, they forgot all the world—everything save their love!

Afterwards Eric told her of what had happened, and of the series of incidents that had culminated in his interview with Lord Westlynn.

"Why, it sounds like a romance!" Hilda exclaimed; "and, after all, you have deceived me, for instead of a 'soldier of fortune,' I am engaged to a man far above myself in rank."

"But far below you in everything else, and only made worthy of you by his love!" Eric whispered back.

The country for many miles round was thrown into a state of unparalleled excitement, for so many events had not tripped so quickly on each other's heels in the memory of the oldest man in W—shire. First of all, Miss Fitzherbert had been miraculously—as it seemed—restored to life; then Eric Verrall had been installed at Dering Court as the Earl's elder son, and had assumed the style and title of Viscount Dering; then Miss Monkton had

disappeared, and finally, Sir Douglas St. John came back to the Manor, bringing his wife with him!

The wiseacres shook their heads, and wondered what it all meant; but their curiosity was not destined to be gratified, for no one save the persons intimately concerned ever knew that Nadir, the Hindoo who for so long had lived at Dering Castle, was identical with Sir Douglas's unfortunate wife.

Arthur was one of the first to hear of the St. Johns return; but astonished as he was at the news concerning Ida's mother, he was still more astonished at receiving, the next morning, a letter from Ida herself.

"Will you come and see me at once?" it said. "I have a great deal to tell you, for we have both been the victims of a great mistake, and—if you still wish it—everything can now be explained."

Directly he received this epistle the young man set off for the Manor in a tumult of delighted surprise; and when he arrived there he was met in the hall by Ida, who led him into the drawing-room.

She was rather paler than usual, but had dressed herself with great care, and looked as pretty and coquettish as ever.

"I hope," she observed, demurely, as she closed the door, "that my summons has not kept you from fulfilling more important engagements?"

"Don't jest, Ida!" he exclaimed; "you know quite well that there could be no other engagement which would concern me as nearly as seeing you. In your note you spoke of some mistake—what was it?"

In an instant her coquettish airs vanished, and she became as serious as he was.

"I thought there was an insuperable barrier between us," she said, looking down, "and now I find there is—not!"

"Then do you mean to say that you are now willing and free to become my wife?"

"Yes, supposing that you still wish it."

What Arthur said need not be chronicled, but after a short indulgence in the sort of idiotic behaviour lovers most affect, a sudden thought struck him, and he said,—

"One thing, Ida, I must tell you; I am no longer Viscount Dering, but simply a younger son, of somewhat limited means. What do you say to that?"

"Ah! I knew all about it ever so long ago," she returned, indifferently. "But your news falls very flat after mine. I have a whole history to repeat, and I feel for all the world just as I used to when I was a little girl, saying a lesson off by heart. First of all, you know my mother has come back?"

Arthur bowed acquiescence in silence. He knew little about Lady St. John, but that little was hardly in her favour. Ida was quick to observe the gravity in his face.

"Oh, Arthur!" she exclaimed, very earnestly, while tears welled up into her bright eyes. "I wish I could tell you all my mother has suffered, and how nobly she has borne her troubles! You know of what she was accused—a blush rose to the girl's face, and her fingers twisted themselves together after a nervous fashion peculiar to her—"well, only two days ago her innocence was proved. Colonel Fanshawe died, and just before his death he confessed that he had not only mesmerised her, but given her drugs in order to take her away from her home, and that he believed her to be one of the purest of women."

Then followed an explanation of what is already known to the reader, and after that Arthur and Ida went together into the library, where they were received by Sir Douglas and his wife—both of them anxious to welcome their daughter's future husband.

Little more remains to be told unless our readers wish to follow Hilda and Ida to the altar, where some three months after the events just recorded they were led by Lord Westlynn's two sons, and such a wedding had not taken place in W—shire for many a long year.

The county papers were full of the beauty of the brides, and the gallant bearing of the bridegrooms; and when, amidst a shower of rice and old slippers, they set forth on their honeymoon, good wishes followed them from all sorts and conditions of men.

Amongst Hilda's wedding presents was a gorgeously illuminated floral album from Emmeline De Courcy Saunders, together with a note from that young lady, informing Miss Fitzherbert that by the time she received it the wonder would have changed her name for the less grandly sounding one of "Mills."

People say Sir Douglas St. John has grown young again—perhaps it is because he has partly relinquished his studious habits now that his gentle and still beautiful wife is by his side. They are called by their neighbours "Darby and Joan," and the one effort of the baronet's life seems to be to try and atone to Idalia for all she has suffered. He knows now of her connection with Lord Westlynn through her sister's marriage, and that it was Florence he saw at Shrewsbury station that unhappy day so long ago.

Lacy was offered a home by both her brothers-in-law, but declined the offer, and has installed herself in the suite of apartments formerly occupied by Nadir at Dering Castle, for it is to Eric, the son of her favourite sister, that her heart turns most fondly, and although he and she had a difference of opinion with regard to the legitimacy of the means she took to possess herself of Anne Lloyd's papers, it is the only quarrel that ever has, or ever is likely to, take place between them.

There is the prattle of childish voices and the music of childish laughter at Dering Castle now, and Hilda thinks her fortunes are their brightest and best!

[THE END.]

## FACETIÆ.

"You never saw my hands as dirty as that," said a petulant mother to her little girl. "No; but your ma did, I daresay," was the reply.

"That's a beefsteak joke," remarked one of the boarders at breakfast. "What kind of joke's that?" asked the man across the table. "Too tough to be pleasant."

AN APOLOGIST.—"I am extremely sorry I offended you yesterday; you must not be angry with me; you see I always get excited when I hear people talk such rubbish as you did yesterday."

"One half the world don't know how the other half live!" exclaimed a gossiping woman. "Oh, well," said her neighbour. "don't worry about it; 'tisn't your fault if they don't know."

THE subject of christening ships with bottles of wine is about to be taken up by the temperance people, who assert that the rolling of vessels at sea is mainly caused thereby.

A LADY relates a story of her little boy whom she took last summer for the first time to the seaside. The little fellow was greatly pleased with the sight. One day, when he saw the first ocean steamer approach the coast, he was exuberant: "Oh! mamma, just come and see. There's a big locomotive taking a bath."

SOME people when they experience a loss are despondent; others go to work all the harder and make a gain that more than covers the loss. There is a good moral in the following. At the battle of Shiloh an officer rushed up to Grant and said: "Sheneral, Schwartz's battery is took." "Well, sir," said Grant, "you spiked the guns before they were taken?" "Yab! Schpike dem new guns? No, Sheneral, it would schpooil 'em." "Well, then, what did you do?" "Do? Vy, we went right in and we took 'em back again."

"What is the worst thing about riches?" asked the Sunday-school teacher. And the new boy said, "Not having any!"

THE Press, the Pulpit, and Petticoats—the three ruling powers of the day. The first spreads knowledge, the second morals, and the last spreads considerably.

Nervous old lady enters a train; when about to seat herself discovers a horrid man with a gun. "I hope that thing is not loaded," exclaims sportsman: "Yes, ma'am, it is. However, I will insert this cork in the muzzle. There!" The timid one is satisfied.

THE other day, as two friends were talking together in the street, a donkey began to bray and wheeze and cough in a distressing manner. "What a cold that donkey has!" said one of the men. "And, by the way, that puts me in mind—how is your cough?"

Mrs. FLEMING has written to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to know if something can be done to prevent horses being "scratched" before a race occurs. She is sure it must be very painful, because her husband is sometimes quite upset, and she hears him groan in his sleep about a horse being "scratched."

OLD MAN (to daughter): "Young Mr. S. paid you a fine compliment last evening, my dear." Daughter (delighted): "What was it, papa?" Old Man: "He said you were a very intelligent young lady." Daughter: "Oh, pshaw! I told mamma I should look like a fright in the brown dress, but she insisted on my wearing it."

MR. POMPANO: "Aurelia, do you know what I would do if I were a woman?" Mrs. Pompano (in the sulks): "I do not." Mr. Pompano: "I would always preserve a cheerful demeanour. I would not wrinkle my face or spoil my beauty by pouting." Mr. Pompano: "Indeed! Do you know what I would do if I were a man?" Mrs. Pompano: "I am anxious to hear." Mr. Pompano: "I would buy my wife a new bonnet rather than have her spoil her beauty."

A PIECE of evidence in a Quebec breach of promise case was a cuff with an offer of marriage written on it. One night while the defendant was holding the plaintiff's hand and whispering fervid words, he popped the question in manuscript on the smooth linen at her wrist. She was sentimental or shrewd enough to keep that article out of the wash, and now it is of practical value.

## MUSIC.

I HAV no ear for music, but I Huv it, bekauze i kant help it.

I luv to arrive at sum kuntry hotel, tired and sleepy, and hav the musician ov the house start incontinently and mount the stool at once, and commense tew maul the keys ov sum old boney planner.

The artist ov the oceanbun iz sumtimes the landlord's son—useless for anything else—a semi-tyrant in the family, lazy, just bekauze he knows how tew abuse an old, worn-out mahogany instrument, that klatters as timeless as a pedlar's kart ov tin-ware, running away, with a blind hose.

Sometimes the artist iz the dauter of the hous, just hum from her fust and last quarter at sum nabring femal akademy, and then we hav opera-musik, accompanied bi her bewitchful voice, which reminds one ov a plaintive wild kat wooing sum other kussed kat in the top ov a gum tree.

I do luv this kind ov musik; it fires up mi soul, it lights up mi spirit, it thaws off mi ears, like the liquid sweetness ov a cracked dinner gong or the tender effusions ov a wood sawyer fling up his saw.

I hav bin told bi good judges if I would kultivate mi ear I would learn how to luv this portikular kind of musik; and I serpose, also, if I would kultivate my palate, I would learn how to apprechiate biled krow.

But I presume I shall be just as happy if I don't never know how biled kro dez handle for vittles.—*Josh Billings.*

MONEY and trouble are something alike. People will borrow rather than not have them.

"WHAT's that?" said Pat to the glassware dealer. "That's a set of opaque glass." "Powers! Sure Oi lived the most of me loif near the O'Pakea, and never a glass had they, but a pewter pot."

When he was married he promised to cleave to her to the end. And the first time they visited the theatre he clove at the end of each act.

A somewhat weather-beaten tramp being asked what was the matter with his coat, replied: "Insomnia; it hasn't had a nap in ten years."

"Red astin rain umbrellas" have been introduced into Paris. They would be of no use here, for we have no rain of that kind in this country.

"What are the last teeth that come?" asked a Lynn teacher of her class in physiology. "False teeth, munn, replied a boy who has just waked up on the back seat.

"Are you a marrying man?" was asked of a sombre-looking gentleman at a recent up-town reception. "Yes, sir," was the prompt reply. "I am a clergyman."

"I've come to ask a favour of you," said Mrs. Porcino to the minister. "Sally is very restless and I can't get her to sleep. Would you lend me one of your sermons to read to her? That will fix her, I know."

A MOUNT hunter spent three months looking for a grizzly bear, and the man's relatives have spent three months looking for him. They think he must have found the bear.

"AND now, my dear brethren, what shall I say more?" thundered the long-winded minister. "Amen!" came in sepulchral tones from the absent-minded deacon in the back of the church.

"SPLENDID colour, isn't it?" asked the fish-monger, cutting open a salmon. "Yes," replied the purchaser; "looks as if it was blushing at the price you ask for it."

"Don't flounder about so," said the crabbed mackerel. "Shut up or I'll whale you," said the other. "Will you do it a porpoise?" asked the mackerel. "Not a shade-dow of a doubt of it," replied the other. "I beg you to be clam, gentlemen," entreated a lobster. "Or eel get in hot water," cried a sheephead on his mussel, and they all went off for currents.

An old bachelor, through no fault of his, was looking at a little baby, and was expected to admire it, of course. "Well, Mr. Bilkins," said the proud young mother, expectantly, "is it not very lovely?" "Yes—er—that is to say—er um—about how old must such a baby be, Mrs. Tomkins, before it begins to look like a human being?"

"CONFOUND it all," said Mr. Smith, "there comes Jones, and I owe him two pounds. He'll ask me for it, sure." "I'll tell you what to do," suggested Mr. Smith's friend. "Just take a drink out of that street fountain." "How will that prevent him from asking me for the money?" "He'll think you haven't got any."

An enthusiastic Liberal grocer in Birmingham had the other day printed in large letters on a board placed over the shop-door the following words: "Mr. Gladstone says, 'Jam is the best substitute for butter.' Try our home-made jam." A woman entered his shop, bought two pots of "our home-made," and carried them off. In a few days she returned, laid one pot of the jam on the counter, and with an indignant air exclaimed, "I've been brought up to believe that every word Mr. Gladstone spoke was truth. I'll never believe him again." "Indeed, madam—why not?" inquired the bewildered grocer. "Why?" repeated the indignant matron. "Because he said jam was the best substitute for butter. It is not. It won't fry my fish!"



## SOCIETY.

THE Duke of Gothland, the second son of the King of Sweden, the reported fiancé of the Princess Louise of Wales, is expected to arrive in England in the early part of this "merry month," and will be for some time the guest of the Prince and Princess of Wales.

THE Crown Prince and Princess of Austria intend to pay a visit to the Edinburgh International Exhibition in course of the summer. The Royal party will also make a tour through Scotland, if the health of Prince Rudolph is such as to permit it, but we regret to hear that he is subject to the same complaint from which the Duke of Albany died.

THE Danish Minister and Madame de Falbe have gone for a two months' cruise in the Mediterranean.

THE annual interesting ceremony, in the course of which the Emperor of Austria washes the feet of twelve old men, and afterwards serves them at dinner, took place recently in the Imperial Palace. Owing to the absence of the Empress the same ceremony with twelve old women did not take place.

At a recent meeting of the hounds belonging to Earl Ferrers at Staunton Harold, the members of the hunt presented him with a handsome silver service, on his marriage with the Lady Ina Maude White. The presentation was made by the Earl of London.

THE Pope intends to make a valuable present to the University of Heidelberg. He has ordered a catalogue of the Latin and Greek Manuscripts in the Bibliotheca Palatina, which were transferred in 1692 from Heidelberg to Rome, to be prepared and exhibited at the fourth centenary of the University, which is to be celebrated this summer.

FROM Nice we hear of an engagement between Prince Johann of Mecklenburg with the Princess Elizabeth of Saxe-Weimar, daughter of the reigning Grand Duke.

At a fancy dress ball, which was given at the Quirinal Palace in Rome recently, Queen Margherita (the Lily of Savoy) wore a black lace apron, which was embroidered all over with diamonds and emeralds; the little pockets were each garnished with four emeralds, one centimetre thick, and the apron strings consisted of a double row of genuine Oriental pearls. Experts have estimated the value of this costly article of costume at four millions of francs.

MARRIAGES will take place shortly between Colonel the Hon. Eyraud Digby (Grenadier Guards) and Lady Emily Fitzmaurice, sister of the Marquis of Lansdowne; between Sir R. Sutton and Miss Beatrice Corbet, fourth daughter of Sir Vincent Corbet, Bart.; between the Rev. Barton E. V. Mills and Lady Catherine Hobart-Hampden, sister of the Earl of Buckinghamshire; between the Hon. Charles Trefonis and Lady Jane Grey, sister of the Earl of Antrim; and between Mr. John Gull, only son of Sir W. Gull, Bart., and Annie, second daughter of Lord Justice Lindley.

THE Duchess of Edinburgh is shortly expected at Coburg, to place her son at the Gymnasium or public high school there.

SOCIETY is again commencing to talk of a bride for Prince Albert Victor. The young lady, whose charms and talents seem to fit her for the position, is the Princess Victoria of Teck, daughter of our own Princess Mary Adelaide. The Princess Clementine of Belgium, about whom we know nothing, is also spoken of as a likely bride for our Prince, if she is educated in the Protestant faith.

THE marriage of Miss Alice de Worms, eldest daughter of Baron H. de Worms, M.P., to Mr. J. H. Warner, of Quorn Hall, Loughborough, was recently celebrated at St. James's, Westminster. The bride wore a costume of the richest poul de soie, made with a very long train.

## STATISTICS.

EASTER MONDAY.—As a consequence of the beautiful weather on Easter Monday all the London suburbs were crowded with holiday-makers. Although there was a considerable falling off in the numbers which visited the museums and galleries in the metropolis, yet this discrepancy was more than accounted for by the extraordinary crowds thronging Hampton Court, the Crystal and Albert Palaces, and the different parks and commons. Hampstead Heath, it is stated, was visited by 100,000 persons. Epping Forest by 60,000, Kew Gardens by 40,000, Hampton Court by 20,000, the State apartment at Windsor by over 8,000, the Tower by 5,000, the Crystal Palace by 50,000, the Albert Palace by 20,000, and the Zoological Gardens by 31,000. It is difficult to estimate the numbers which thronged Battersea Park and the long road leading from Chelsea Bridge to the Albert Palace. The figure has been put at 100,000, but as the stream ebbed and flowed during the whole of the day, it might have reached an aggregate of anything under 250,000. The most satisfactory freedom from anything in the shape of riot was everywhere observable, and in the V Division of police, of which Mr. Digby is the superintendent, and which stretches from Battersea to Kew and Richmond, there was scarcely a complaint of damage done by the holiday-makers. The British Museum received 7,367 spectators, while last Easter Monday the return was 8,573. The number admitted into the National Gallery was 10,250. In 1885 it was 16,550. The visitors to South Kensington Museum up to six o'clock at night amounted to 14,928, of whom 7,961 were counted at the Museum, 4,310 at the West Galleries, 2,655 at the Indian Section. In 1885 the total was 21,528.

## GEMS.

Our happiness in this world depends on the affections we are enabled to inspire.

SINCERITY is the first element of all good conversation; all others combined cannot atone for its lack.

He who betrays another's secret because he has quarrelled with him was never worth the sacred name of a friend. A breach of kindness on one side will not justify a breach of trust on the other.

SUCH is the effect of refinement and affability of manners, when blended with intelligence and virtue, that prepossessions are at once enlisted in favour of those who are so pre-eminently endowed.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

FROSTING BRASS WORK.—Boil in caustic potash, rinse in clean water, and dip in nitric acid till all oxide is removed; then wash quickly, dry in boxwood sawdust, and lacquer while warm. This will give brass an ornamental finish.

CHOCOLATE CREAMS.—Three quarters of a pound of best chocolate, two quarts of milk, four eggs, flavouring. Boil the milk and sweeten it to taste. Scrape and dissolve the chocolate in a little warm water, then add the milk gradually, and mix the whole until very smooth. Now boil it again, stirring constantly, until the chocolate is cooked. Beat up the yolks of the eggs, and add the chocolate to them, being careful to allow the latter time to cool before adding it. Put the whole on the fire in a clean vessel, and boil it till it acquires the consistency of a rich custard. Then pour it into a deep dish. Beat up the whites of the eggs until very light, sweeten them with sifted sugar, and flavour with vanilla or almond, or any other flavouring to suit the taste. Cook them lightly over boiling water, and ornament the top of the cream with mixture.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

Do a good thing for others whenever you can, whether you find people grateful or not. There is no greater pleasure than that which comes from the consciousness of having done a good act.

GATHERING AND DRYING TEA IN JAPAN.—Tea gathering is commenced in May. Girls are employed, at an average of twopence halfpenny a day, from sunrise to sunset. The sprig of leaves is nipped off carefully with the finger daily and deposited in a basket, and other servants carry these baskets, as they are filled, to the tea-planter's house and necessary out-houses. Here other employees spread them out on large palm mats, and here the first and only adulteration essayed by the tea-planter is executed. Having decided the percentage of exhausted leaves to mix with his fresh leaves these are put also on the mats. The drying is in the open air and in the sunlight. That having been completed, the next operation is the curling. To effect this the dried leaves are poured into open, cast iron receptacles over a charcoal furnace beneath of accurately graded heat. Sufficient labourers are placed around the pans to constantly take in their hands the leaves as they become heated and to roll them. When the curling is done the leaves are packed in coarse, cheap boxes freighted to the nearest tea market and there sold to a foreign tea dealer. Every foreigner keeps a special variety of tea-taster, who has to tell the quality of the fresh leaf and to make a guess at the amount of leaves that have already done service.

OUR FRIENDS.—Why do we treat our nearest and dearest friends worse than we do any one else? It is, perhaps, because we are sure of their affection and their kind consideration, and so we devote ourselves to the task of endeavouring to win over the great world, that cares not a fig about us, to our side. It is an undoubted fact that we show our greatest failings to our friends, and not only to our friends, but to our husbands and wives. We say things in their presence that we would not utter elsewhere, and we sometimes cut so deeply that it takes all the healing power of love to close the wound. Forbearance is a great virtue, and it often has to be practised by our intimates. The wife who was remonstrated with because she entertained her friends with a hot supper and let her husband eat a cold one some hours afterwards, said loftily: "Poor Peter don't care." But he did care all the same, though he said nothing, and remembered the slight when the opportune moment arrived, much to the fine lady's astonishment. We are all too prone to make the remark, "Poor Peter don't care," or something like it, and this would be a much happier and less selfish world if we reformed this altogether.

MARRIAGE CUSTOMS.—It was formerly the custom in many parts of Scotland for the bride, immediately after the wedding, to walk round the church unattended by the bridegroom; and matrimony was avoided in the months of January and May. After a baptism the first food that the company tasted was crowdie, a mixture of meal and water, or meal and ale. Of this every person took three spoonfuls. The mother never set about any work until she had been kirked. In the church of Scotland there is no ceremony observed on such occasions, but in this instance the woman, attended by some of her neighbours, entered the church, sometimes in service time, but oftener when it was empty, went out again, walked round it, and then returned home. After baptism the father placed a basket filled with bread and cheese on the pot hook that hung suspended over the fire in the middle of the room in which the company were, and the child was handed across the fire with the intent to frustrate all attempts of evil spirits or evil eyes. The custom appears to have been designed as a purification, and was of idolatrous origin, as the Israelites made their children pass through the fire to Moloch.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

**LELIA.**—The best teachers of singing are to be found in Paris and Milan.

**R. D. R.**—Renovate the iron mantel with a coat of black varnish, procurable at any paint shop.

**E. T. T.**—The best teachers do not wish girls to use the voice very much until they are about eighteen.

**G. M. S.**—The question is a disputed one. There are good authorities for both expressions.

**S. P. P.**—Wash the window curtains in water containing but little soap, rinse thoroughly in clear water, pass through blue-water and dry in the open air.

**A. M. A.**—The penmanship can be greatly improved by a little practice—say an hour each day, until the letters are formed with more neatness and regularity.

**S. L. L.**—You are slightly above the average in weight for a girl of twenty, but need give yourself no alarm on the subject, as you seem to be possessed of a most symmetrical form.

**C. W. W.**—Cast your eyes over the advertising columns of any daily newspaper, and doubtless you will thus ascertain the address of the makers of the article for which you are seeking.

**P. P. H.**—The invitations should be sent to all the intimates of the bridal couple, as it would be very unkind to forget any of them, and thus make them feel that their friendship was not desired.

**A. H. R.**—1. Five feet 4 or 5 inches is the average height of sixteen-year old youths. The average weight at that age is between 125 and 130 pounds. 2. Beautiful penmanship.

**LILLIE.**—The judges of the penmanship tournament in which you were one of the contestants showed rare good taste and sound judgment in awarding you the first prize.

**G. R. H.**—Ask verbally for the permission to visit the young lady, although it is very likely that if your company is desired she will extend the invitation without waiting to be asked for it.

**C. H. P.**—In *M. Zet's Magic Flute* there is a high F, that is four notes above the usual range of a soprano voice. This is the highest note, however, sung, and is taken by very few singers.

**W. E. R.**—Remove the grease spots from the carpet by placing a piece of blotting paper under the stain and one immediately above it; then pass a hot iron over the paper, and in this way extract the grease without injury to the fabric.

**T. F. P.**—1. Interest your friends in your behalf, and perhaps they can get you employment in copying, addressing envelopes, or something of a similar kind. Or you might purchase a rubber stamp outfit, and sell the products of your labour to local merchants and others. 2. Very neat penmanship.

**E. W. G.**—An invitation from a gentleman to a lady to attend a ball, the theatre, lecture, concert, or other entertainment, should read as follows: "Mr. Belton would be pleased to have Miss Martin's company at the opera (or whatever the event may be) on Thursday evening next." Such an invitation calls for an immediate answer of acceptance or rejection.

**M. D. T.**—1. The two dates—April 9 and 27, 1867—fell on Tuesday and Saturday, respectively. 2. Plenty of outdoor exercise and a regular course of living in the matter of eating, drinking and sleeping have much to do with increasing one's weight, provided Nature is willing to allow of such addition of flesh and muscle.

**W. E. E.**—There is no way in which small-pox marks may be effaced, although several remedies have been suggested from time to time. Medical science has progressed so rapidly that a patient need have no fear of pitting, the present treatment of small-pox precluding the possibility of the disease making such hideous inroads upon the persons of those afflicted with it.

**R. T. S.**—1. One octave and four notes is a very good range for an untrained female voice. Training, by good teachers, often enables a singer to take two or three notes, both above and below the original range, so that a good, well-trained soprano can sing from low A to high B, that is, two octaves and one note, while contraltos can sing from low C to high F, two octaves and three notes.

**H. H. B.**—Each different colour of sealing-wax has a special significance. Blue denotes constancy; dark green, hatred; light ruby or rose, affectionate remembrance; pale green, innocence; yellow, jealousy; yellowish green, disappointment; dark brown, melancholy and reserve; ruby and cardinal, ardent and burning love; vermilion, a proposal of marriage. Waite is used for weddings, chocolate for dinner invitations, and black, drab and purple for mourning.

**N. D. P.**—1. Whit Sunday is a contraction of the words "White Sunday-tide," the English name of the season of Pentecost (the day of the descent of the Holy Ghost on the apostles). It is so called from the white garments anciently worn by the newly-baptised neophytes, to whom that sacrament was usually administered on the eve of Pentecost. The name comprehends the entire week which follows Pentecost Sunday, but the word is more strictly applied to the Sunday, Monday and Tuesday of that week. It is observed as a period of high festivity in many countries. Whit Monday being in England for example a Bank Holiday.

**J. N. W.**—1. A lady should not take her escort's arm until it is offered, unless she is on very intimate terms with him, when, if he is forgetful in offering it, she may remind him of the fact.

**GEORGE.**—A better way would be to find out what trade your son likes best by studying the bent of his character yourself. A boy is apt to do better at a trade of which he is fond than at one which he dislikes.

**N. T. C.**—If he refuses to return the photographs, letters and other articles, there is no redress. He has acted in a very ungentlemanly manner, and it would doubtless be impossible to teach him good manners.

**H. C. R.**—The name "Julia" will be found in the 10th verse of the 16th chapter of the epistle of St. Paul to the Romans. This is the only place in which it is mentioned in the Bible.

**C. C. M.**—To correct an offensive smell in the feet, wash them every day in water containing a few drops of ammonia. Another remedy is to bathe them in a weak solution of permanganate of potash—1 scruple of the salt to 8 ounces of water.

**A. A. R.**—Over three-fourths of three words in the English language are derived from the Latin, more than one-fourth from the French, about one-tenth from the Saxon, and a little less from the Greek. The indebtedness to other languages is small.

**M. N.**—1. We would not recommend the book named to the attention of any young persons, as it does not contain matters calculated to elevate their moral ideas. 2. Your opinion is highly appreciated. The age, sex and residence of our contributors cannot be given to the public, for the reason that they object to it.

## CRADLE-SONG.

Rock-a-bye!  
Swings the cradle to and fro,  
Rocking softly, rocking slow,  
As the rosy baby sleeps  
Almost in the land of dreams.  
Then, behind wide open eye,  
All at once, the baby's eye,  
Full of laughter and surprise!

Rock-a-bye;  
Sweet my baby, sleep and rest.  
Little birds in the warm nest  
Sleep beneath their mother's wing.  
Do they dream of anything?  
Of the rain, or of the rose,  
Summer's sun or winter's snows?  
Oh, my baby, no one knows!

Rock-a-bye!  
Mother drops her kisses in  
Dimples deep on cheek and chin;  
Just for kisses, baby dear,  
Nothing else, are dimples here.  
Cuddled in her cradle-nest,  
With life's riddle all unguessed,  
Sleep, my little one, and rest—  
Sleep and rest!

E. E. R.

**WHO IS THE HEIR.**—As far as we can understand your case your cousin has no claim, but to make "assurance doubly sure" you had better consult a respectable solicitor in your town, who, with all the facts before him, will give you, no doubt, competent advice.

**AMY A.**—A poor complexion, with coarseness and roughness of skin, is not a thing which can be washed away with any cosmetic. It is occasioned by a bad state of the blood, or by some internal ailment, and must be overcome by removing the cause. Carefulness of diet and plenty of outdoor exercise are among the best restoratives.

**R. H. H.**—Lip-salve, made by melting in a jar placed in a basin of boiling water a 1 of an ounce each of white wax and spermaceti, 15 grains of flour of benzoin, 3 ounces of oil of almonds, and 1 coloured red with a little alkali root, is an elegant and harmless preparation. Applied to the lips it gives them a fresh, rosy appearance. Be careful to stir the mixture until it becomes thoroughly cooled.

**F. R. A.**—1. Wedding presents should be recognised as spontaneous rather than obligatory gifts. It is, however, considered in a measure obligatory upon all relatives and immediate friends of the happy couple to remember them on the occasion of their wedding, and also all those who have already been remembered by them in like manner. The whole matter is left to the discretion of such friends, but if they are not invited to the wedding reception, it seems as though it should be taken for granted that they are not considered intimate friends.

**C. T. R.**—When a gentleman is accepted by the lady of his choice, the next thing in order is to go at once to her parents for their approval. In presenting his suit to them, he should remember that it is not from the sentimental but the practical side that they will regard the affair. Therefore he should describe the state of his affections in a calm, plain, straightforward manner, give an account of his pecuniary resources and general prospects in life, and finally ask their permission to take her under his protection. It stands to reason that no set form of speech can be used on such an occasion. When a man is so exceedingly bashful that he cannot ask verbally for the hand of his lady-love, or gain the permission of her parents by word of mouth, he may resort to a written declaration.

**R. N. C.**—1. Judging by your handwriting your character is devoid of firmness, as there is an uncertainty in the lines, and a want of confidence in the placing of the pen to paper, both of which indicate a hesitating, nervous disposition.

**W. S. W.**—If the picture really bears the date of 1834 it must have been put on as a joke. Oil painting, in the ordinary use of the term, only came into use after the year 1400. If the painting is of any value it is simply on account of its merits, and any picture-dealer will give some estimate of its age and price.

**C. W. G.**—How will the following lines suit you for insertion in *Lot's* album?—

"Leap forth the lightning of thy glance  
On light and silly lovers; some  
Talk off of love as of a dance;  
Turn from these prattlers when they come—  
A man who loves is nearly dumb."

**CHIRP.**—If you rub the eggs carefully with good butter, just after they are laid, they will keep fresh for a long time. Probably a cheaper and more effective treatment would be to plunge them in a bath of paraffin, so as to coat them uniformly with a thin, semi-transparent layer, which would exclude the air.

**A. P. P.**—You say that you have an enormous appetite, and eat so much that you feel a choking sensation and are greatly distressed. That is enough of itself to give almost anybody the dyspepsia. Should you state all that to a physician, hear what he has to say about it, and then follow his advice, it is probable that you would get relief.

**A. H. X.**—The exceedingly high colour of your face is probably caused by an excess of blood. A very simple remedy for this is to take a Safford powder before breakfast for two or three mornings in the week, repeating it every three weeks, until beneficial effects result. This will relieve fulness of the head, and serve to cool the blood and start it into quicker action.

**LOTTA.**—There are private instructors who teach elocution to young persons who wish to become actors or actresses, and give them a good deal of information about the business of the theatrical profession. But no one can learn to be an actor in that way. He must get a subordinate situation on the stage, and, unless he happens to be a genius, work his way up by slow degrees, doing a great deal of hard and disagreeable work for small pay.

**P. P. D.**—You are not too old to begin the study of law, and your commercial experience and habits would be of use to you in professional life; but, on the other hand, your progress will be necessarily slow, and unless you think you would take an interest in legal studies for their own sake, we could not recommend you to take up law as a profession. If you do decide to abandon business, you should enter a good law school, consult some lawyers of your acquaintance about getting into an office, and meanwhile read Blackstone, Coke, and other standard works.

**W. C. M.**—The palace of Miramar, a modern structure, is situated a few miles from the Austrian capital, Trieste, on the Adriatic. It was the summer residence of Maximilian and Carlotta when Maximilian was governor of the Austrian province of Lombardy-Venice. Something is said about the Castle of Miramar in most of the guide books relating to Trieste. When the empress was on her way to Rome to appeal to the Pope on behalf of her husband, she stopped for a short time at Miramar; and when her mind finally gave way completely at Rome, she was taken back to the castle by her brother. She was soon afterwards removed to Belgium, where she still lives, surrounded by the form of a court, in one of the royal residences belonging to the family of her father, the late King of the Belgians.

**TESSE.**—St. Valentine, according to some ecclesiastical writers, was a bishop, who was beheaded at Rome in the year 270. He was said to be such a good man, and so famous for love and charity, that the custom of choosing valentines on his festival day, February 14th, took their rise from thence. Others derive the custom from the alleged fact that the birds choose their mates on or about the 14th of February. And still other authorities say it comes from an old heathen custom, prevalent at Rome, which was celebrated early in February, and during which the names of young women were placed in a box from which they were taken by young men, as chance directed, and the one who drew a girl's name was supposed to have an influence upon her affections, and she upon his.

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